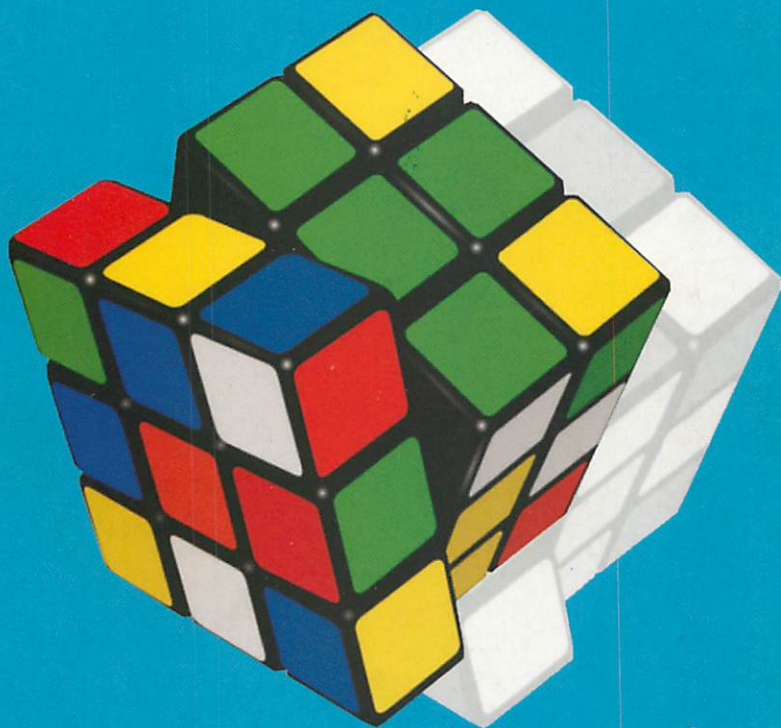


Gláucia Renate Gonçalves (UFMG)
Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida (UFMG)
Vera Lúcia Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva (UFMG)
Adail Sebastião Rodrigues-Júnior (UFOP)
Organizers



NEW CHALLENGES IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

The publication of *New Challenges in Language and Literature* is a milestone in the history of the Brazilian Association of University Professors of English (ABRAPUI). After decades of co-sponsoring dozens of conferences on language and literature, always counting on the participation of Brazilian scholars from all over the country as well as the collaboration of their international counterparts, the Association, already consolidated and with its seat in Belo Horizonte, the capital city of the State of Minas Gerais, felt itself strong enough to hold its First International Conference at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (2007). About eight hundred scholars applied and hundreds of studies (lectures, panels, symposia, papers) were presented. It is safe to say that the growth of the Association reflects, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the increase of research and scholarship in the area of English studies in Brazilian universities.

This volume, which gathers together selected works by scholars from several Brazilian states, located in four of the five regions of Brazil, and from abroad (Canada, India, Japan, United States), constitutes a highly representative sample of the kind of work developed by members of the Association. As the organizers put it, "among the first questions raised were: instead of a retrospective gaze at what has been done already, what are some of the issues that affect – and perhaps

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New Challenges in Language and Literature

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New Challenges in Language and Literature

Table of Contents

Foreword: New Challenges, Daring Responses <i>The Organizers</i>	9
Part 1. New Challenges in Language	
Ethnography and Complexity in SLA Research <i>Adail Sebastião Rodrigues-Júnior</i> <i>Vera Lúcia Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva</i>	13
Students' Experiences and Beliefs in the Language Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities for Reflective Learning <i>Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos</i>	27
"Great Expectations": Understanding Hope Through Efl Teachers' Narratives <i>Andréa Machado de Almeida Mattos</i>	41
A Reflection on the Challenges for Teaching Genres in University Settings <i>Antonia Dilamar Araújo</i>	53
Genres in English Language Course Books: Teaching Words and Images <i>Barbara Hemais</i>	67
Slang and the Internet <i>Connie Eble</i>	81
The Identity of "World English" <i>Kanavillil Rajagopalan</i>	97
Fractals and Fragmented Identities in Language Acquisition <i>Liliane Assis Sade</i>	109

Some Crucial Elements of Learning Ecologies of Linguistic Contagion	
<i>Tim Murphey</i>	129
Authorship in Materials Design for Language Teaching	
<i>Wilson J. Leffa</i>	149
The Challenge of Autonomization	
<i>Walkyria Magno e Silva</i>	167
Foreign Languages Teaching, Education and the New Literacies Studies: Expanding Views	
<i>Walkyria Monte Mór</i>	177

Part 2. New Challenges in Literature

Transnational Cinema: Representations of Latin American Geopolitical Struggles in Contemporary Anglo-American Films	
<i>Anelise Reich Corseuil</i>	193
Red Criticism	
<i>Eloína Prati dos Santos</i>	203
New Challenges from the Lost Unity: Shakespeare, Performance and Difference	
<i>Erick Ramalho de Souza Lima</i>	225
The Challenge of Critical Reflexivity Through a Postmodern Paradox	
<i>Fabio Akcelrud Durão</i>	241
Postmodern Fiction Challenges: Reevaluating the Vietnam War and the War on Terror	
<i>Giséle Manganelli Fernandes</i>	253
Postmodern Challenges in Alice Munro's Short Fiction: Issues of Language and Representation	
<i>José dos Santos</i>	265
The Deconstruction of Cultural Icons in the Fiction of Sandra Cisneros and Helena María Viramontes	
<i>Leila Assumpção Harris</i>	275

India's "Truths": Criticism Across Borders for an Alter-Post-Colonialism	
<i>Makarand Paranjape</i>	287
Feminist Criticism and Knowledge: (Literary) History and its Silences	
<i>Rita Terezinha Schmidt</i>	307
In and Out the Global Village: Gender Relations in a Cosmopolitan World	
<i>Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida</i>	317
Hypertext, Information Overload, and the Death of Literature	
<i>Sérgio Luiz P. Bellei</i>	329
<i>Oracle Night</i> : A Bakhtinian Reading of Paul Auster's Metafictional Narrative	
<i>Sigrid Renaux</i>	349
Diaspora and Modernity: The Postethnic Ethos in Denise Chong's <i>The Concubine's Children</i>	
<i>Smaro Kamboureli</i>	363

Foreword

New Challenges, Daring Responses

The Brazilian Association of Teachers of English Language and Literatures in English – ABRAPUI was founded in 1970, and since then has organized several conferences that focused on a variety of topics. At first the language and literature meetings were held separately, but as the years passed we witnessed an ever increasing approximation between the two fields. After two joint conferences for language and literature in the years 2003 and 2005, there was little doubt as to the validity of such interface, and the organizers of the 2007 meeting – ABRAPUI's first international conference – at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in Belo Horizonte, searched for a theme that would be equally relevant and would incite enriching presentations and contributions to both fields of investigation. Among the first questions raised were: instead of a retrospective gaze at what has been done already, what are some of the issues that affect – and perhaps afflict – both the research and teaching in the fields of language and literature in our own present time? What are some of the strategies that researchers and educators have been employing to deal with these issues?

Somewhat surprisingly, we stumbled upon the extent to which interdisciplinarity has been effecting changes in both fields. For instance, on today's agenda is the relation between language teaching and technology, as well as the connection between literature and other forms of art – just to name two examples, for the sake of illustration. The common denominator behind all our queries and our probing into contemporary issues became then the conference theme: New Challenges in Language and Literature.

In recent years research on language and literature has become increasingly interested in challenging issues concerning the forms of approaching specific queries and potential responses to them. This interest has led researchers to question current ways of investigation in order to switch over to new systems of inquiry. A wide range of scholars in both areas of thought has addressed several questions on a number of specificities without necessarily arriving at satisfactory conclusions that could reveal an accurate picture of the phenomenon under analysis. Bearing this in mind, this volume of essays recognizes the need to present new challenges by raising questions such as: what changes have the research and teaching of language and literature undergone in the recent past? What are some of the challenges of researching and teaching a foreign language and its literature within the Brazilian university system? What sort of cross-cultural interactions have proven beneficial? The problems addressed by the various authors and their texts move toward considerations that ultimately hope to enlighten the following concerns: how to take advantage of the fast technological innovations to promote curriculum changes; how to foster autonomy and better equip our students for their academic pursuits in the twenty-first century; how changes in the cultural, social and political setting, both in Brazil and abroad, have positively influenced research and teaching activities; how to assure that yet unheard voices will be made audible; how to induce and foster the development of new topics of research and teaching that have emerged in recent years in our areas ; how to cope with challenges posed by the classrooms, by learners' identities and the identity of the English language itself; and how to create learning ecologies going beyond the classroom.

The conference resulted in the electronic proceedings, but the urgency of the theme and its appeal to the conference audience have also led to the publication of this homonymous volume of essays. The reader will find here not a printed version of the oral presentations, but rather selected essays that are the product of the presenters' discussion and post-conference further considerations.

The Organizers.

PART 1

New Challenges in Language

Ethnography and Complexity in SLA Research

Adail Sebastião Rodrigues-Júnior
Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto

Vera Lúcia Menezes de Oliveira e Paiva
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais/CNPq/FAPEMIG

1. Introduction

Ethnography as logic of inquiry (Green, Dixon and Zaharlick) has been regarded as theory and method to investigate educational phenomena within and across sites of literacy and first language studies (Green and Bloome). Concerning English as a Second Language (ESL) research, however, ethnography has been widely utilized as a means of collecting and analyzing data from classroom events (van Lier). The core of ethnography as logic of inquiry presupposes first and foremost that researchers take into account the multitude of social, cultural, political and economic complexities commonly found in the field of education. By the same token, ethnography as logic of inquiry has to carefully consider the complexities of the events under scrutiny, in a bid to represent reality as a complex, dynamic and mainly unpredictable system.

Given that in complex systems agents are “constantly acting and reacting to what the other agents are doing” (Larsen-Freeman, “Chaos” 143), this chapter aims to discuss some possibilities of interconnection between ethnography and complexity theory and its application to ESL research, besides being the first exploratory discussion of this subject in the field of ESL research in Brazil. The main focus here is to discuss some challenges involved in using ethnography as one methodological possibility for the application of complexity theory in ESL.

Traditional research characterizes itself for isolating parts of a specific phenomenon in order to study it, principally research orientations that take for granted specific phenomena without considering the influence of context and human agency on multiple possibilities of particular events and their relation to wider constructions of reality. Nevertheless, a new research attitude enables the researcher to view her/his research object as a complex system. Second language acquisition (SLA) and classroom culture are not different from several other human phenomena. They are also complex systems, comprised of different elements which interact among themselves, influencing and being influenced by other elements in the system. Davis and Sumara point out that classrooms are “open, self-organized systems that operate far from equilibrium” (25) and that learning should be “understood more in terms of ongoing renegotiations of the perceived boundary between personal knowing and collective knowledge” (27). They also remind us that complex systems are open as “they constantly exchange energy, matter, and information with their contexts. In the process, they affect the structures of both themselves and their environments” (14).

As complex systems agents are “constantly acting and reacting to what the other agents are doing” (Larsen-Freeman, “Chaos” 143), in order to understand language learning, we need a methodology which takes into account the multitude of social, cultural, political and economic complexities that (un)predictably emerge from the interaction in the field of education. It is our contention that ethnography as logic of inquiry is one potential option to study the complexities of the events under scrutiny, in an attempt to represent reality as a complex, dynamic and mainly unpredictable system.

In what follows, we face the challenge of presenting the first discussion of intermingling ethnography and complexity theory as complementary perspectives for the analysis of second language learning phenomena. Our intention stems from the challenge presented by Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, in which they posit that

[a]s an idea like complexity spreads to fields *outside its origins in mathematics and science*, and as is used more widely, there is a broadening and loosening of theoretical commitments such as *defining criteria for categories*... For example, classification criteria for complex systems *in originating fields* are very explicit, whereas, for applications *outside of originating fields*, criteria seem to be “deliberately vague.” (25, our emphasis)

Consequently, the challenge we take up in this chapter is to explore further the interconnections between complexity theory and ethnography, having undoubtedly in mind that the preliminary discussion held here is the first step of a more systematically theorization in this direction. In order to work on this assumption we will present the characteristics of complex systems in section 2 and will discuss ethnography as a basis for understanding the complexities of SLA in section 3. Then we will present some conclusions with an eye to exploring this issue in a more systematic way in future research.

2. Some characteristics of a complex system

We take for granted that language learning is a complex system, as defended by Larsen-Freeman (“Chaos,” “The Emergence”) and Paiva (“Modelo”). The main characteristics of a complex system are dynamicity, non-linearity, adaptability, self-organization, and emergence.

Seldom, if ever, is the system in equilibrium, given that *dynamicity* is one of the main characteristics of a complex system. The system changes over time and so do its components. When learning a language, changes happen often as the result of feedback and the system adapts itself to the new environment, learning from its experience. The changes are non-linear as the effect is not necessarily proportional to the cause. They are, in fact, chaotic. The system is apparently disordered, although there is an underlying order in this apparent disorder. Nothing is determined or predictable.

Another feature of such a system is thus *non-linearity*. Apparently, there are no causal relationships to explain how learners learn to interact in a language, or why they acquire certain features of the language and not others. Unpredictability seems to govern this kind of system. Kirshbaum explains that

the unpredictability that is thus inherent in the natural evolution of complex systems can yield results that are totally unpredictable based on knowledge of the original conditions. Such unpredictable results are called emergent properties. Emergent properties thus show how complex systems are inherently creative ones.

The complex systems are creative and the essence of creativity is unpredictability. Humans, for instance, are unpredictable learners and this characteristic gives rise to the emergence of creative learning experiences.

Emergence can be understood, according to Johnson, as “what happens when the whole is smarter than the sum of the parts.” To put it very bluntly, Holland explains that “the whole is indeed more than the sum of its parts” and we cannot understand the behavior of a whole system by “summing the behaviors of its constituent parts” (122). When researching human language learning, for example, one must consider that we cannot understand what it is by looking at isolated factors. Research on language tests, for instance, has shown limited information about the process-product relationship between how learners learn and the outcomes they produce from this learning. It is known that students’ production varies substantially and differently according to the contexts from which they stem.

We need a methodology whose tools can identify the interconnectedness between the different instances of the same phenomenon. With respect to this position, we do believe that ethnography is one promising methodology to be adopted as an orienting procedure to investigate the complexity of specific communities of practice, being the second language classroom one of these communities. Larsen-Freeman and Cameron shed light on this assumption by explaining that

The theory that we choose to work with, explicitly as researchers and perhaps implicitly as teachers, will dictate how we describe and investigate the world. It controls how we select, out of all that is possible, what to investigate or explain, what types of questions we ask, how data are collected, and what kinds of explanations of the data are considered valid.

In deciding which type of data to collect, a complexity theory approach with its central focus on dynamics *requires us to look for change and for processes that lead to change*, rather for static, unchanging entities. (16, our emphasis)

In our view, ethnography is one means of capturing the changes that happen over time in specific communities of practice, since ethnography opens up multiple possibilities of understanding social phenomenon from an *emic*, or insider, perspective. By actively participating as members of the community studied, researchers are allowed to locate relevant social aspects and to make the complex web of relationships they observe and actually consider important to pinpoint.

Another characteristic of complex systems is *adaptability*, that is to say, the system capacity to reorganize itself in reaction to the interference

of external agents. This marked characteristic of the system leads the latter to self-organization, or the system's ability to search for organization whenever it has been disturbed by surrounding forces. Thornbury reminds us that

systems that are left to themselves (closed systems) tend to run down – they move from order to stasis, just as an unwound clock will eventually stop. However, open systems – systems that are open to intake of new energy – may move in the opposite direction, evolving into more complex states. (49)

Changes and perturbations make the system work, so it gets increasingly more organized because of its own dynamics. By being adaptive, dynamic systems have the capacity to learn from experience and change. As the system evolves it increases in complexity and self-organizes itself.

There is enough evidence to argue that language learning is an adaptive complex system due to its inherent ability to adapt to the different conditions imposed upon it by individual as well as by environmental constraints inside and outside the classroom. Transforming oneself into a speaker of a second language is a complex process and implies changing from total order (speaking a first language) to chaos (irregular experiences with the second language). Chaos is defined as “a long time behavior of a dynamical system characterized by a great deal of irregularity”¹ and that is exactly what happens with SLA – a long time experience full of perturbations and irregularities as the learner tries to cope with this new linguistic behavior.

The evolving of a SLA system can be observed and analyzed if researchers utilize a methodology which permits constant observation, in order to systematically and clearly perceive the occurrence and re-occurrence of the changes in the system over a specific period of time.

It is our contention that ethnography can shed much light on the SLA process as it does not only focus on the product *per se*, but on the process as well, besides taking into account the parts of an event as possibilities of occurrences of the whole as well as other factors that influence the whole. That is, ethnography is a holistically oriented perspective to understanding human agency and the way humans interact in socio-cultural environments.

¹ Glossary of Dynamical Systems Terms, available at <http://mrbs.niddk.nih.gov/glossary/glossary.html>

3. Ethnography as logic of inquiry

The term ethnography comes from the Greek word *ethnos*, which means people or cultural group, and the term *graphia*, which means writing or representation of specific groups of people through writing (LeCompte and Priessle). The etymological definition of ethnography carries in itself the explanation of what an ethnographer is supposed to do – describe specific cultures and groups of people, be they exotic groups from different cultures or groups within the ethnographer’s culture. Consequently, the ethnographic description of a culture does need long-term participation within the community investigated in order for the ethnographer to gain confidence from the people s/he analyzes and principally to build rapport (Spradley). Athanases and Heath, building on Talbert’s view of an anthropological basis for ethnography, calls our attention to this long-term period of exploration by arguing that

the discovery of cultural patterns [is] the primary goal of anthropology [and] long-term fieldwork in pursuit of that goal requires a period of at least a year of study and participant observation. The researcher becomes immersed in the culture as, at minimum, a “tolerated observed.” The researcher engages in comparative science, using a relativistic view (treatment of language norms on their own terms), demonstrating sensitivity to context or the interrelated nature of social systems within which the culture under study is situated and the pursuit of complementary scholarly study to understand cultural patterns noted in the fieldwork. (267-68).

Cultural Anthropology has split ethnography into two interconnected characteristics, that is to say, ethnography as *product* – ethnographic writings and descriptions of particular cultures, and as *process* – techniques and methods of acquiring knowledge of specific groups or communities by using fieldwork and participant observation (Sanjek). Albeit the product of ethnography is the main aim of any research conducted by ethnographic principles of knowledge and cultural description, the processes of entering into the field, participating as an in-group member *inserted* in the community studied, building rapport, and exploring culture as the representation of the community under analysis are in fact the core of ethnography as logic of inquiry. By doing so, the researcher becomes part of the complexity of

the culture under investigation, with the intention to allow her/himself to be influenced by the dynamics of the people studied as if s/he belonged to that community as a member. This participation allows possibilities of grasping the phenomenon under investigation in its entirety, by means of perceiving the dynamicity of the events, their non-linear evolving, and the emergence of unstable aspects that pervade the social phenomenon being chaotically constructed.

Ethnography as logic of inquiry has been considered one influential means of exploring and describing specific cultures and communities of practice within education. Intertwined views of classroom dynamics with wide ranges of social practices have been the core issue of school ethnography and its logic of investigation. According to Athanases and Heath,

an ethnography can provide researchers, teachers, and other educators with rich documentation of learning as it unfolds and varies over time, leading potentially to insights into cultural patterns, formulation of hypotheses for testing, and support for generation of theory. (263)

The researcher can thus observe and at the same time be part of the dynamicity and self-organization of the system. According to Larsen-Freeman (“The Emergence”), complex events within the field of ESL can be “best appreciated by adopting a more emic perspective,” that is, a perspective that transforms the researcher into a member of the community under analysis and into someone who takes part in the events of that community, being thus one contributor for its transformation as well as someone being transformed by eventual changes within the community (608).

Ethnographic research does not adopt isolated observation techniques *per se*, nor does it exclude the voices of the people investigated from its writings. On the contrary, ethnography requires full participation of the researcher in the culture of the “other” and appropriate registering within ethnographic products (reports, monographs, narratives and so forth) of the voices of the latter. The data are contextualized in a non-linear way and the researcher can see how everything is dynamically interconnected in a live unpredictable system. He or she can also view different levels of reality and different points of view. Chaos, in this aspect, becomes easier to grasp, given the multiple possibilities of experiencing the complexities of the phenomenon lived by both the members of the community and the researcher inserted in the same setting.

Likewise, ethnography leads to the metaphorical view of the ethnographer as a bridge which constantly fills the gap between what is already known about that culture and what is to be known about the dynamics of that culture as well. Green, Dixon and Zaharlick caution that

[a]n observer who enters with a predefined checklist, predefined questions or hypotheses, or an observation scheme that defines, in an *a priori* manner, *all behaviors or events* that will be recorded is *not* engaging in ethnography, regardless of the length of observation or the reliability of the observation system. Further, if the observer does not draw on theories of culture to guide the choices of what is relevant to observe and record, or overlays his or her personal interpretation of the activity observed, they are not engaging in an ethnographic approach from an anthropological point of view.² (202, emphasis in the original)

In fact, predefined checklists may prevent the observer to grasp what emerges from the interaction among all the elements of the system that are inserted in that specific culture. One important but contentious conceptualization often cautiously approached by anthropologists is the uses of the term *culture*. The post-Boasian tradition of anthropological inquiry discusses as to which extent culture maps out individuals lives and social practices and vice-versa, given the fluidity of the term, which is due mostly to the multicultural and globalized world individuals live in (Barnard and Spencer). Far from coming to terms with the controversial definitions and applications of culture within Anthropology, the concept of culture we find rather appropriate and suitable to the purposes of this chapter is that of Frake:

Culture is not simply a cognitive map that people acquire, in whole or in part, more or less accurately, and then learn to read. People are not just map-readers; they are map-makers. People are cast out into imperfectly charted, continually seas of everyday life. Mapping them out is a constant process resulting not in an individual cognitive map,

² For a translated Portuguese version of this work, see Green, Dixon and Zaharlick (“A etnografia”).

but in a whole chart case of rough, improvised, continually revised sketch maps. Culture does not provide a cognitive map, but rather a set of principles for map making and navigation. Different cultures are like different schools of navigation designed to cope with different terrains and seas. (6-7)

The concept of culture adopted by Frake stands for the notion of dynamicity and instability, since culture, according to him, is an “improvised, continually revised sketch” that, we would add to that, responds to the unstable features of any social system, and which are constantly changing over time (6-7).

Taking into account educational research based upon a purely ethnographic logic of inquiry, Heath states clearly that some problems may arise as to what school setting seems mostly appropriate to be studied as well as an ethnographic research to be carried out. Given that an ethnographic-oriented research aims primarily at describing a specific culture and its multiple and dialectical forms of social dynamics, Heath argues that school settings are just one part of the breadth of sociohistorical features an ethnographer may encounter and perceive within a culture. Bearing this assumption in mind, Heath affirms that

when formal schooling is the focus of research, anthropologists attempt to study it in relation to the broader cultural and community context in which it exists. For example, the behaviors of pupils are ideally viewed not only in relation to fit or contrast with those of teacher, typical student, or successful pupil, but also with respect to home and community enculturation patterns of pupils and teachers. (37)

What Heath attempts to show is the fact that ethnography in education, interpreted as logic of inquiry, may naturally lead to a juxtaposition of complex perspectives and procedures of investigation of the social dynamics under scrutiny that a unique perspective may not reveal. An example of this juxtaposition is Solsken’s long-term ethnographic triangulation. Solsken contrasted one male student reading activities within different sites, more precisely, in his bedroom, during his family homework session, in the kindergarten and second grade class with a female teacher, and in his first grade class with a male teacher. Her research demonstrated that the student under analysis used to see literacy practices as women work only,

given her mother and sisters habits of reading at home, which explains his literacy problems with the female teacher. On the other hand, when attending the first grade class with a male teacher, the boy has considerably improved his reading skills, since he realized that literacy is not only women work in general. By tracing the boy's literacy development within three years of analysis, Solsken was able to construct a picture of the student's reading improvement and its interconnections between school reading activities, home reading activities and self reading interests. The results Solsken has found are heavily due to her long-term research and the possibilities this ethnographic procedure has provided. Consequently, knowledge emerged from the complexity of the boy's culture. Had not Solsken actively participated in the boy's complex school and family cultures, the emergence of unstable and chaotic events surrounding the boy's literacy process would not have come to light.

As we have been discussing so far, ethnography as logic of inquiry has gained considerable ground in educational research, principally in the field of literacy (see, for instance, Castanheira, Castanheira et al., Green and Bloome, Green, Dixon and Zaharlick, Heath). However, according to Rodrigues-Júnior, in the field of second language teaching and learning in Brazil, ethnography has been used more as a tool or orientation to research method than as logic of investigation, since research has more generally focused on ways of collecting data from an ethnographic perspective than taking into consideration the ethnographic logic of inquiry that necessarily needs to lie behind the research. This common tendency mostly leads to a misinterpretation of the fundamental principles and scope of ethnography in the field of second language studies in Brazil (for a similar discussion in Anglo-American academy, see Watson-Gegeo).

4. Conclusion

Ethnography methodology is in accordance with the complexity science as it focuses on observation and description of several layers of adaptive, non-linear, self-organizing systems, that is, with learning systems. In language learning contexts, ethnography knowledge emerges out of the interaction of the array of data such as observation, field notes, narratives, interviews with teachers and students, video and audio recordings, transcripts,

etc. Besides that, the researcher is also seen as involved with the culture s/he studies. Davis and Sumara state that “complexity thinking helps us actually take on the work of trying to understand things while we are part of the things we are trying to understand” (16). When doing ethnography, the ethnographer tries to understand the phenomenon as involved with it and not detached from it. The researcher subjectivity is both present in his observations and field notes and s/he is also part of the research context. Thus, the researcher, on the one hand, affects and, on the other, is affected by the other elements of the culture under investigation. The research develops itself through the juxtaposition of complex perspectives and research tools, revealing aspects of multiple forms of social practices, such as intertwined views of classroom dynamics. This condition (or challenge) translates into practice what Larsen-Freeman and Cameron affirm about complexity theory: “It needs to be complemented with other, compatible, theories that together cover all that needs to be described and explained about the phenomena of interest” (17). We do believe, therefore, that ethnography is one compatible method and theory that can complement complexity theory and its focus of interest.

We assume that the field of SLA acquisition lacks research work which considers the broader culture in which the learner is integrated. A big challenge for ethnographic research is to go beyond the classroom setting since SLA does not only emerge from the confinements of classroom contexts. Experiences outside school are of paramount importance in the development of the new language as shown by narrative research (see Benson and Nunan, *Experience and Learner's*; Paiva, “Online”; Murphey, *Language and Language II*). If we examine most of the research reports which claim to use ethnographic methodology, we will realize that observations, videotaping, *inter alia*, usually show only what happens within a very specific culture, that is, the school. Nevertheless, if we consider SLA as a complex system, we will see that multiple cultures interact, affect and are affected by the emergence of a new language. We must go beyond the school walls in order to find out which communities of practice (see Wenger) the learners are engaged in, which imagined communities (see Murphey and Chen) they aspire to belong to, or which language experiences the learners have undergone in other settings than the classroom context *per se*.

It is of crucial importance that researchers understand all the components of SLA as a complex system, and that poses a big challenge to researchers because hardly ever will a single researcher be able to investigate all those aspects. It seems that we need to operate with multidisciplinary groups in order to work into a more oriented complexity perspective. Finally, by interacting with different specialists we can learn more about the process of learning a language and collaboratively advance our knowledge on SLA.

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Students' Experiences and Beliefs in the Language Classroom: Challenges and Opportunities for Reflective Learning

Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos
Universidade Federal de Viçosa

Classroom life is what teachers and learners make it. At the same time, classroom life is what they make of it, and what it makes them. These apparently simple observations capture both the inherent contradictions of classroom life and its complex, systemic nature. (Wright 64)

The language classroom has always had a special place in the fields of education and language teaching (Allwright, Breen, Dornyei and Murphey, Erickson, Feiman-Nenser and Floden, Gieve and Miller, Holliday, Murphey, van Lier). In my own work as a language teacher and as an applied linguist I have been studying and trying to understand the complexity of the language classroom by investigating students' culture of language learning ("A Cultura") and the relationship between teachers' and students' beliefs about language learning in the language classroom ("Understanding").

But why talk about the language classroom and its challenges? According to Holliday, "learning about the classroom is an essential aspect of learning to teach" (162). However, we need to ask: which classroom are we talking about? In which country? Which region? In which context: in a private English course, a private school, a regular school or a language classroom in a language teacher education course in Brazil? Depending on the answer, the challenges will be different. Each context brings its own possibilities, dilemmas, tensions and challenges for teachers, students and researchers

alike. In Brazil, we know of the enormous challenges faced by many teachers in regular schools with large classes, excessive work hours, lack of administrative support, lack of discipline and many times, violence. As important as these challenges are, due to constraints of time and space it is not possible to address all of them. In this paper, my examples will be from a language classroom in a federal university where I teach pre-service English teachers. However, many of the challenges presented here refer to the nature of the language classroom in general that are common to many language classrooms that we have been in as language learners or teachers.

The language classroom is full of challenges that have puzzled researchers for quite some time, as stated above. According to some researchers (Block, Holliday), understanding the language classroom challenges is the first step to becoming a teacher. There are no easy solutions or ready recipes for these challenges and it is not my intention here to discuss those. Rather, I discuss the challenges and reflect on them with the aim of offering a better understanding of this complex space which is the language classroom. What I can suggest is tolerance and humbleness to learn how to live with some of the challenges and extract from them the best opportunities for learning – both for students and teachers.

As one of the most common places people learn languages, researchers developed different ways to talk about it and different metaphors and images to depict this complex place where learners and teachers meet together to learn and teach a language. The aim of this paper is to talk about the nature of the classroom and its challenges based on previous studies on the nature of the language classroom. It is divided into three parts, according to images of the language classroom and its own challenges: the classroom as an iceberg, as coral reefs and as a discourse. I conclude with some suggestions for students and teachers to transform the challenges into learning opportunities for reflective learning and teaching.

1. The iceberg of the language classroom: beliefs and emotions

Although this image has been quite used in many situations (usually to talk about beliefs), this is an adequate image for the language classroom as well, since the actions we see on the surface are just the tip of the iceberg.

To understand what really goes on inside the classroom we need to look beneath the surface and ask ourselves questions, such as:

1. What meanings do teachers and students attribute to the task of language learning and teaching?
2. What beliefs lie behind their actions in the language classroom?
3. How do cognitive and affective aspects affect the language classroom?

Below the surface, we find the underlying beliefs and the meanings attributed to the actions of the main actors. This image emphasizes the force of students' and teachers' beliefs and the meanings they give to the task of learning languages in a given context, as shown in the anecdote below, which may ring true for most of teachers who have seen students' beliefs in action:

“I was reminded of when I was teaching in a language school in London. We had put some sentences on the board, and I invited a German student to suggest which was the best. He was a friendly, witty young man, and by way of a joke replied, ‘why don’t you say, you are the teacher.’ I replied, ‘I am not a teacher, I am a language acquisition facilitator,’ to which he instantly responded with: ‘In that case, please facilitate the right answer.’” (Philip Glover, November 3, 1998. tesl-l@cunyvm.edu)

Episodes such as these abound in language classrooms and give us a glimpse into the sort of cognitive dissonance that can happen. In other words, teachers and students bring their different beliefs about language learning and teaching and about the role of teachers and learners to the language classroom. Sometimes, as the anecdote shows, they come to the surface in teachers' and students' exchanges; other times, they become the hidden curriculum and may bring conflicts to all participants. As mentioned by Block, if we want to understand the classroom we have to understand the conflicts that occur within it. The conflicts bring with them emotions that students and teachers feel in this complex environment.¹ According to

¹ For an interesting work on students' emotions in the classroom, see Aragão.

Wright, “classroom learning and teaching is an emotional activity” (76). Part of this emotional dimension has to do with the nature of a *language* classroom. As pointed out by Allwright, the language classroom brings specific challenges since “the student can be wrong in several ways: he gets the content but doesn’t get the pronunciation or the grammar” (“Contextual” 120). This can generate several feelings in students and teachers, such as:

- Fear of giving the wrong answer
- Fear of not giving the answer the teacher wants
- Fear of making mistakes in front of others and sounding foolish or not intelligent
- Fear of silence
- Fear of being called on by the teacher
- Fear of looking different from the crowd, seeming to know more than others and being seen as the “know-it-all”

These are fears students may have. However, teachers also have many fears such as the fear of unintentionally embarrassing students and of correcting them too little or too much. Teachers face many dilemmas which are part of the teaching profession. As pointed out by Feinam-Nemser and Floden, “teachers must inevitably act on incomplete and uncertain evidence while maintaining their faith in the appropriateness of what they do” (515). Teachers are also afraid of students’ silence. This may be related to the advent of communicative language teaching which emphasizes speaking and participation. According to Holliday, the teacher in this method acts as an instigator who requires everybody’s participation. This may bring fears to teachers – who are afraid that if students do not “participate”, it is a sign of their failure – as well as to students who may feel afraid to display their knowledge to the whole group.

In short, the challenges of the iceberg refer to dealing with students’ and teacher’ beliefs and emotions and to highlighting their power bringing them to the fore. However, this image shows only part of the complexity of the language classroom. The image of the language classroom as coral reefs will add yet another dimension and other challenges to the language classroom.

2. The language classroom as coral reefs: the power of culture

The characterization of the classroom as a culture finds resonance in the literature which sees culture within a wider perspective. The term culture has been used in the educational context for quite some time now. Several authors have talked about the culture of specific activities (Holliday), organizational cultures (Handy), schooling and teacher culture (Hargreaves), cultures of teaching (Feiman-Nemser and Floden), and cultures of learning languages (Almeida Filho; Cortazzi and Jin; Barcelos, "A Cultura"). According to Erickson, the notion of culture has to do with a group's shared ways of giving meaning to the social action, which can reveal the patterns of actions and assumptions underlying educational practices ("Conceptions" 23).

Breen used the metaphor of coral reefs to illustrate the complexity of the culture of the classroom. According to the author, like coral reefs, little of the classroom life can be seen from the outside. To understand it, we need to look beneath the surface. This metaphor is similar to the iceberg. Yet, while the iceberg focuses on the power of beliefs, this image emphasizes the social nature of the classroom and its culture situated in a given social context. In other words, as pointed out by Coleman, in the language classroom, students can learn "other things in addition to – or even in place of – the language" (10). These other things may include aspects such as "an understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of teachers and students, the maintenance of face, and the development of student solidarity" (10).

Breen explained that the metaphor of the classroom as coral reefs entails eight essential characteristics:

1. **Interactive:** Each classroom has a dynamic nature of interaction and communication where personal purposes and meanings contrast with norms to be followed.
2. **Differentiated:** Each classroom includes multiple subjective views and difference of interpretations that may bring potential conflicts and dilemmas for participants.
3. **Collective:** Each classroom represents the meeting point of the individual as well as the collective world of the groups. Individual learners will be engaged both individually and collectively in the learning process.

4. Normative: Each classroom has its own norms, conventions, and rules. Learners come into the language classroom with a ready set of norms about classrooms in general, influenced by their earlier school experiences. However, learners and teachers may also create new norms in each new classroom.
5. Asymmetrical: Each classroom includes asymmetry of roles between teachers and students. This asymmetry may sometimes include a mismatch in beliefs, attitude, and values.
6. Inherently conservative: Teachers and students try to conform, overtly at least, to the rules and conventions of the classroom. Any innovation is met with resistance at first because it represents a threat to the established order.
7. Jointly constructed: Teachers and learners negotiate meanings and purposes.
8. Immediately significant: Each classroom accommodates individual and collective interpretation of activities, their purposes, and reasons.

While Breen portrays the classroom as a culture, Holliday emphasizes the aspects of subgroups or subcultures within the classroom. According to Holliday, the classroom provides both teachers and students with traditions, recipes, and tacit understandings about acceptable forms of behavior. Thus, they are constantly adapting and readapting themselves to the new classroom culture and subcultures within the different groups. This culture is transmitted to new members, who have to learn and share it in order to be accepted by the group. Hence, students are constantly trying to grasp the new classroom culture and its implicit rules.

The metaphor of the classroom as coral reefs emphasizes the classroom as a community where one does not learn by himself/herself but in the company of others. Learning is essentially a social and cultural activity, and learning a language is even more so, since language permeates all social relationships. In a language classroom, we learn a language in the company of others, and this social relationship influences what learning is and how it is done (Breen).

This brings us to the concept of co-presence put forth by Allwright (“Contextual”). He uses the concept of co-presence as a key contextual factor in classroom language learning that can influence how students learn.

This term refers to the influence that other people have on our learning (or on our actions and beliefs about how to learn). The following excerpts, taken from Miccoli, illustrate the effect of co-presence on students' learning:²

So, I wait for somebody to answer... because I know that some people have difficulties. But I have already studied this. So, I ended up answering and my classmate said, 'huh, she knows everything!'. Then I feel tense and afraid that people may think that I want to speak up, that I am the best in the classroom, that I am the best student, that I know everything. That is why I stay quiet, avoiding answering a lot so that the rest of the class do not think I am trying to show off in class. (207)

Even if I want to speak, I will not because the class will think I am a nerd. Sometimes I want to speak so bad, use a different expression, but I stay quiet so that they do not think I know it all. (209)

These excerpts offer us a glimpse into students' experiences as well as into the social dimension of the classroom. To Allwright, students under-represent their knowledge. Facing the conflict of how they want to represent themselves to teachers and colleagues in the classroom, they choose their classmates. This social pressure is exerted both onto students and teachers and it is a constant potential source of inhibition, according to Allwright. While Allwright emphasizes the challenge that group pressure can exert on students, Murphey highlights the fact that teachers and students can engineer their environment to create 'learning ecologies of linguistic contagion' in which students and teachers can contaminate each other into imagining possible and ideal selves for themselves as language learners ("Learning"). This influence can be encouraged and fostered by teachers who would promote this environment by emphasizing cooperative learning and learning in communities.

The metaphor of the classroom as coral reefs highlights its cultural aspects and social dimension. Like coral gardens, language classrooms are situated within specific contexts, embedded in other cultures, as shown in Figure 1.

² The excerpts were originally in Portuguese and were translated by the author of this paper.

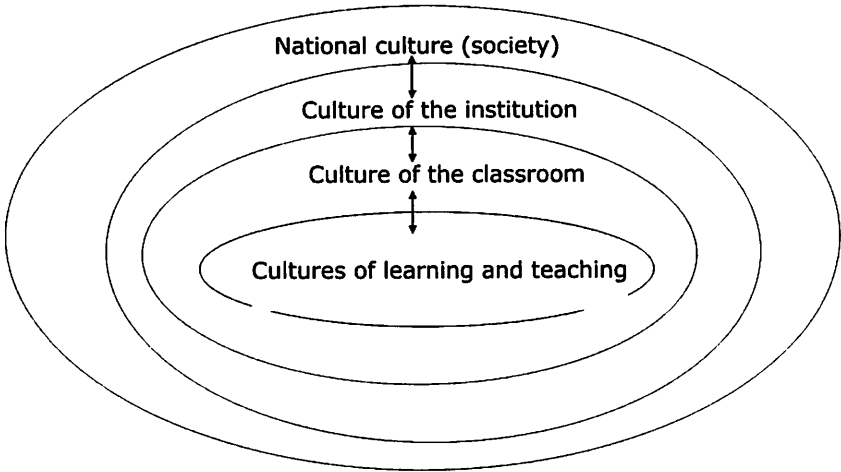


FIGURE 1 - Embedded cultures.

According to this figure, the cultures of teaching and learning are intrinsically related to each other. The culture of the language classroom is situated within these other cultures and they influence each other reciprocally. They are embedded within a specific culture within an institution which is part of a national culture of a given society, influencing all these cultures and being, at the same time, influenced by them.

In short, the image of the language classroom as coral gardens brings the challenge and opportunity of learning for teachers and students to be ethnographers and anthropologists of their own classrooms and recognize that they help mold, each day with their beliefs and actions, the norms of this culture. This metaphor allows us to see the language classroom as a culture with its own rules, traditions and recipes. But it does not say much about the kinds of discourses or texts that are present in this environment. This is what the last metaphor talks about: the classroom as a text and discourse.

3. The language classroom as discourse

According to Breen, learners should be seen as discourse practitioners. As such, they know what counts as knowledge worth acquiring, the valid

interpretations and appropriate behaviors in class. Based on Fairclough, Breen points out the several types of texts present in the language classroom:

- a) Classroom texts: in the classroom, the language or communication can be spoken, non-verbal, and written;
- b) Discursive Practice: “how texts are produced and interpreted and how different types of texts are combined” (121);
- c) Social practice: “organizational and institutional circumstances that generate and delimit both the specific text and discursive practices of lessons” (121), such as how the furniture is organized for instance. These social practices construct teachers and learners as such.

Breen explains that the text available to learners in the classroom is an amalgam of “three dominant and inter-weaving discursive practices”:

- “Communication through the target language;
- Metacommunication about the target language;
- Communication about the teaching-learning process, its procedures and classroom routines” (123).

As discourse practitioners, learners “have to navigate through its intertextuality identifying the textual cues which signal a transition from one kind of talk to another” (123). This navigation is certainly based on their a) beliefs about teaching and learning; b) history and experiences with outside classroom discourses; c) their understanding and contribution to the emergent classroom culture.

In short, the challenges of this image refer to teachers and learners as discourse practitioners who must be able to navigate the discourse of the language classroom. What is available for learning is related to the quality of a text jointly produced by teachers and students within the discourse and social practices of the language classroom.

4. Concluding remarks

In this paper I have talked about the language classroom through images that highlight its nature and the challenges it poses to teachers,

learners and researchers. The challenges can also be seen as opportunities for growth for both teachers and students.

As suggested by Kramersch and Holliday, the teachers' role in the language classroom culture should be similar to that of anthropologists in their own classrooms. According to Holliday, "just as anthropologists must humble themselves to the mysteries of the communities they are studying, so must teacher-researchers humble themselves to the classrooms with which they are involved" (31). Similarly, Kramersch suggests that the teacher should be "an ethnographer of his or her own classroom" (172). As an ethnographer or anthropologist, the teacher is "at least partially an outsider to the culture of the students, and the students to the culture of the teachers" (Holliday 142) and thus, he or she has to learn how to unveil the classroom text, as we do in a different social situation. An appropriate methodology, to Holliday, would involve teachers' sensitivity to the language classroom culture, since this knowledge is an essential aspect of finding out how to teach. Researchers who want to understand and investigate the language classroom should have, according to Breen, anthropological sensitivity and employ cautious triangulation in a longitudinal study, questioning his or her own well-established assumptions about the language classroom and having an insistent curiosity for the points of view of learners and teachers.

The following are suggestions which can help us face the language classroom challenges and to help us unveil the intertextuality of the misunderstandings of life in the coral reefs of the language classroom as learning opportunities for learners and teachers:

- a) Reading texts about the challenges of the teaching/learning processes. As an example, we can ask students to read texts written for them to reflect about their own learning process, such as Murphey's ("Language"), for instance. Another important text that can contribute to reflective learning in language teacher education courses is the one by Lightbown and Spada. According to Peters & Le Cornu, "teachers need to teach students more about the learning process and enable students to get to know themselves as learners. This is the role of reflection" (59). This is also a challenge for teachers who need to learn how to do this and for teacher educators who should help future teachers learn

how to provide learning opportunities and experiences that promote reflection on learning in their language classrooms.

- b) Learning how to listen to students: as suggested by Dornyei and Murphey, we need to have time in the beginning of the course to get know students, their beliefs, experiences and emotions in order to create a positive community of learning and minimize the conflicts.
- c) Creating learning opportunities for students to feel responsible for their learning and to understand their own learning processes, learning reflectively by writing their language learning histories and discussing them with their peers. According to Murphey, language learning histories:
 - Help learners to become more conscious about the roller coaster of language learning and of factors that help or inhibit their learning;
 - Help learners to feel more reflective about their own learning in finding out things as they write and talk about this;
 - “Allow learners to ‘invest’ in their learning by constructing their identity as language users” (98)
- d) Discussing their beliefs in the language classroom (Barcelos, “Crenças”). By creating such a space in the classroom we help students to reflect, question and confront their own beliefs, helping them to transform themselves as well as the environment of the classroom.
- e) Using exploratory practice as an approach to understand the puzzles of life in the language classroom.³

In conclusion, language classrooms can be seen as icebergs, coral reefs or texts, each with its own challenges. Each of these challenges can be seen as opportunities for reflective learning if we care to accept the complex and unpredictable nature of the language classroom and care to look underneath it to bring to surface the students' and teachers' experiences, beliefs and emotions that can bring quality of life to our classrooms.

³ For a detailed overview of exploratory practice, see Allwright (“Developing”).

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“Great Expectations”: Understanding Hope Through EFL Teachers’ Narratives¹

Andréa Machado de Almeida Mattos
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

For yesterday is but a dream
And tomorrow is only a vision;
And today well-lived, makes
Yesterday a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Kalidasa

The Brazilian socio-economical situation does not seem to offer many promising options for undergraduate students who wish to pursue the EFL² teaching career. Given the dark picture of the teaching profession in Brazil, it would come at no surprise that young people starting their undergraduate studies would not choose teaching as their first choice of a promising profession. However, this seems not to be the case. Even in face of such an obscure situation they see ahead of them, in terms of their profession, as it will be discussed in this paper, the pre-service teachers who participated in this study seem to have ‘great expectations.’³ Through narrative inquiry (see Clandinin and Connelly), this paper explores the stories of hope which

¹ This paper was first presented at the I ABRAPUI International Conference, as part of the symposium “Believing that it’s possible: the power of student and teacher narratives of hope”, organized by Larsen, D., Li, Y. & Mattos, A.

² English as a Foreign Language.

³ The title of this paper is, of course, a reference to the classic work by Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*.

have supported teachers and teachers-to-be in their choice of becoming EFL teachers. Inspired by research conducted at the Hope Foundation, a research centre affiliated with the University of Alberta, Canada, and a registered non-profit organization dedicated to the study and enhancement of hope, this paper seeks to show the power of stories of hope in the life of a group of undergraduate EFL teachers, who participated in a course on language teacher education, in order to understand how participants find hope in the profession they have chosen.

1. Researching hope

According to Turner, some studies on hope date back to the 1960s: for example, those by Crumbaugh and Maholic, Stotland, and Lynch (Turner 509). Nowadays, there are studies on hope being conducted in several countries worldwide. Moreover, there are several studies on hope in such distinct areas as Psychology, Philosophy, Medical Care, and Nursing, but also in Sociology and Education. It's easy to see that interest in the study of hope has increased all over the world. In Brazil, however, studies on hope are scarce, if not completely absent.

Hope has become an important topic for research because we live in very dark times, as some authors have pointed out (West; Giroux). Throughout the world, societies of all kinds are facing war, terrorism, inequalities, starvation, disease, energy crisis, environmental disasters, and so many other threats to life and peace. In Brazil, we are only too familiar with the so-called "urban wars," especially in Rio and São Paulo, but also in other cities throughout the country. The teaching profession, specifically, has been facing permanent threats. Teachers in general, and public school teachers in particular, including language teachers, receive very low salaries, work long hours, endure poor working conditions, and are forced to tolerate disrespect from both their students and the society as a whole. For these reasons, teachers usually have low self-esteem and a growing number of them tend to be demotivated towards the tasks involved in teaching. These problems generally form a picture of the profession which is not very encouraging for those who are preparing to become teachers.⁴

⁴ See, for example, Gimenez (2005).

In face of this hostile picture, we need to look for sources of enlightenment. The challenge that is posed not only to educational researchers and theoreticians, but also to teacher educators in general and language teacher educators in particular, is to find ways to motivate the teachers and teachers-to-be to go on pursuing their professional ideals. We *need* hope.

2. Defining hope

Generally speaking, hope has been described as the ability to envision a future in which one wishes to participate (Larsen; Li and Mattos). Research overwhelmingly indicates that hope is a vital component of learning and successful change (Cheavens; Michael and Snyder). The energy and action that accompany hope help to make better futures possible both individually and collectively. Turner states that "hope has been studied rather extensively from philosophical, theological, psychological and sociological perspectives" (509). Some of these studies have used Discourse Analysis as a methodological tool (Elliott and Olver) and, in the area of language teaching and learning, Richards and Lockhart have mentioned the role of hope and expectations as part of the learner's belief system.

According to Dufault and Martocchio, hope is "a *multidimensional* dynamic life force characterized by a *confident yet uncertain* expectation of achieving a future *good* which, to the hoping person, is *realistically* possible and *personally significant*"⁵ (379). Although there are several other ways in which hope has been described and conceptualized, many of these conceptualizations include a notion of hope as "an expectation that what is desired is also possible" (Turner 509). Among the main characteristics of hope present in the literature, hope is commonly described as futuristic, motivating, self-sustaining, pervasive and necessary to human life.

Wang affirms that hope is "a common human experience" (248), that is, it is universally lived. However, it is uniquely lived or experienced by each person. This means that, although it is possible to say that all humans have experienced hope in some way, this experience is always perceived and

⁵ Italics in the original.

understood from a uniquely individual perspective. Many other researchers of hope in the areas of nursing and medical care have also shown that it is positively linked to health: hope promotes healing, facilitates coping processes and enhances the general quality of life.

According to Nekolaichuk, Jevne and Maguire, hope is action-oriented and may be linked to other positive indicators, such as self-esteem. The authors highlight the “qualitative experience of hope” (602), and agree with Wang in calling attention to the unique, dynamic nature of hope as a personal experience.

Turner describes hope as having several possible meanings to each individual. Her study aimed at understanding the meaning and essence of hope for the participants and was conducted through interviews which were dominated by the participants’ stories of hope. Two of the described meanings were especially important for the study reported in this paper: hope as “a driving force,” which represented the participants’ goals and dreams that formed the basis for hoping; and hope as “connecting and being connected,” which referred to the participants’ understanding of humans as social beings and a necessity to establish a connection with others.

As described in the following sections, a small-scale study was designed with the broad aim of eliciting stories and reflections on hope, in order to better understand the concept of hope as possibly experienced by teachers and student-teachers in Brazil. Let us listen to these stories.

3. Understanding hope

As mentioned above, this study was particularly inspired by the work of Turner. The context of the study was a 4-month course on EFL teacher education I was offering for the English major at the College of Letters, Federal University of Minas Gerais. The participants were the 18 undergraduate students enrolled in the course who explicitly consented to participate in the study.⁶ Most of the participants were student-teachers with no experience in teaching, but some were already experienced teachers

⁶ In this paper, participants’ identities will be preserved by concealing their names. Only their initials will be mentioned.

of English at local schools and language institutes. During the course, the students were assigned readings on themes related to teacher education and held seminars and discussions on the proposed texts, as well as on related topics proposed by the students themselves. The objective of the readings, seminars and discussions was to foster reflection and raise awareness of important themes related to the teaching profession as a whole, but especially relevant to teaching professionals in Brazil.

At the end of the course, students were assigned a final reflective activity. This activity contained reflective questions related to the course themes, but also three questions which were devised to collect the data for this study. These questions were based on the work of Miller and Larsen and were formulated to elicit participants' narratives (see Clandinin and Connelly) of hope as individually experienced and perceived by each of them. The questions were also formulated with the further objective of eliciting explicit hope-related language and ideas. The questions were the following:

1. What stories from your life experience give you hope for being a teacher? What experiences at the university help you have hope for being a teacher? What experiences support your hopes for teaching? What experiences threaten your hope?
2. Thinking about the topics that were discussed during the semester, what do you hope that being a teacher will mean to you and to your (future) students?
3. In face of all the problems that our country is going through nowadays, and also thinking about the problems specifically related to the teaching profession, how do you hope to contribute to your profession?

The participants in the study were not required to answer all the reflective questions. On the contrary, they were allowed to choose which questions they wanted to answer, but they were supposed to answer at least three of them. Many of the students in the course chose to answer the questions which were more related to the course content. Some of them, however, were willing to reflect on hope and were able to write rich accounts of their hope experiences. After collecting their final reflective activity and

upon reading their texts, I realized that what I had was a handful of stories which help us understand the meaning of hope for these teachers and teachers-to-be, and how they find hope for teaching. The stories that follow in the next section are only a small selection of the richness and hopefulness found in their accounts.

4. Storying hope

In their answers to the reflective questions listed above, the participants shared with me their stories of hope. These stories generally referred to participants' life or university experiences that gave them hope for being a teacher. Some of the participants' stories yielded similar findings as the study by Turner, in that the meanings of hope underlying participants' stories were *hope as a driving force* and *hope as connecting and being connected to people*. Sometimes stories of hope come intermingled with stories of hopelessness, as Miller and Larsen have pointed out. The stories in this study are not different: some of the stories also referred to participants' life or university experiences that represented threats to their hopes. However, participants also talked about how they would turn these threats into more hope for their envisioned futures. Below, I will present some excerpts⁷ from the stories these students so generously have offered me.

5. Hope stories

One of the participants in the study, for instance, says she has had many experiences that support her hopes for being a teacher. The example she cites is full of emotion and passion. The excerpt below is only a small portion of this experienced teacher's story of hope and enthusiasm for her profession:

⁷ The excerpts cited in this paper were only very slightly modified in order to avoid possible misunderstandings on the part of the reader. The symbol [] represents comments or words added by the researcher to clarify ambiguous sentences or phrases. The symbol (...) indicates that irrelevant words or phrases were omitted. All the excerpts were originally written in English.

In my life as an English teacher I have had countless experiences that have given me hope for being a teacher. When you teach beginners that do not know the *verb to be* and at the end of the first class you can see the glow in their eyes because they can say "*My name is ...*" or "*My teacher is ...*", there is not a better sensation, and that sensation of accomplishment comes every time you see a student leave your class knowing more about the language than he did when the class began. (M.V.)

As intended by the formulation of the reflective questions, this excerpt shows how hope is explicitly approached in this participant's story. However, some of the stories narrated by other participants tend to approach hope in a more implicit way, as it is the case in the following example from a less experienced student-teacher:

I had never thought of teaching until I started studying English and later, [I was] invited to become a tutor at the language institute [where] I studied. This opportunity made me see that teaching was a great area in which you share experiences and deal with human beings in the most different ways. You teach, but you also learn a lot. (R.P.)

Although this participant does not mention the word hope or any other related concept, it is possible to perceive through her story that the experience she recounts is an example of something that has given her hope for becoming a teacher.

6. Hope as connecting and being connected

Many of the stories told by the participants share a common meaning with the stories told by the participants in Turner's study. The examples below show excerpts from some of these stories, in which participants refer to this sensation of connecting and being connected to other people, in this case, their own EFL students. Moreover, they all say that what supports their hopes for teaching is exactly this connection with their students.

I really enjoy being a teacher and I love the relationship I have with my students. They certainly contribute a lot in giving me hopes to continue with this job. (A.M.)

What gives me hope to go on teaching is the relationship I have with my students, their concern for me, to see them learning and to see that they are satisfied with their learning process. (L.I.)

What supports my hopes for teaching is knowing that I can help someone to learn. (D.A.)

7. Hope as a driving force

A second meaning found for hope in the participants' stories was *hope as a driving force*. This finding is also coherent with the findings in Turner.

(...) teachers must believe that we can do something for improving the teaching profession in our country. (D.A.)

Of course there are bad things too (...). But I am hopeful: I believe that there is always something that we can do. (D.A.)

It is hard to make changes in our country but we have to believe that it is possible to do something more and to turn our work and our classes more attractive and more respectable among the students. (F.O.)

In these excerpts, participants talk about the necessity of doing something to improve the educational environment in Brazil, a reality that they are all very aware of, either as students or as teachers. Although some of them do not use the word *hope* explicitly, we can perceive that there is always something that drives them in the direction of "believing that it is possible," that they need to cling to their hopes for a better future, both for themselves and for the generations to come.

8. Threats to hope

As I said, some of the stories also revealed hopelessness. One of the reflective questions was, indeed, formulated explicitly with the intention of fostering reflection on experiences that would in some way threaten participants' hopes. Their stories invariably referred to the chaotic situation of the teaching profession in Brazil. However, although they mentioned the low

salaries, the long work hours, and the ill-behavioral nature of students in general, what seems to be most important for these teachers is the fact that the teaching profession is not getting as much respect as they feel it deserves.

Teaching is becoming something very difficult in our country. Not only because students do not want to study hard or because of behavior problems in the classroom. Politically speaking, teaching is something really hard to do nowadays. The salary is not good and teachers, most of the times, have to work long hours to make some money. Besides, we are not respected as we would like to be, especially the foreign language teachers. (A.V.)

We live in a country which does not invest in education. Being a teacher in such a place is not easy. Teachers are not valued, but more serious yet is the fact that teachers themselves do not value their own profession and their work. (M.V.)

9. Threats becoming hope

Amazingly, the participants in this study do not show signs of despair. On the contrary, they seem to believe it is possible to do a good job as a teacher in Brazil, even in face of the dark situation they see ahead of them. Some of the stories they wrote reflect this belief in a better future. Moreover, these stories show that participants believe that the possibility of changing the current situation is in their very hands. Brazilians are said to be generally hopeful. The excerpt below is an example of how hopeful this teacher can be, and how she turns the dark reality into a driving force that only gives her more hope for clinging on.

The fact that we have a problematic situation in Brazil, in relation to the low value that the teaching profession receives, only makes me feel more determinate in doing my best in order to change this situation. (...) I hope always to improve my teaching and then show to the society the importance of teachers in the process of changing the precarious condition of Brazilian education. I really believe things can be changed. (C.A.)

10. Final remarks

As the discussion in this paper shows, research on hope is extensive and expanding in several academic areas all around the world, but not in Brazil. So, this is probably the first report on hope research in the area of language teaching in Brazil, and maybe also in other areas. Obviously enough, it would be difficult to draw conclusions from such an incipient field of study in our country. However, some final remarks are relevant.

The study reported in this paper shows that language teachers are generally hopeful towards their profession, although they recognize that the teaching environment in Brazil is not very promising. The participants in this study also reveal that they find it important to go on believing in their ideals. Not only do they refuse to accommodate to the situation, but they also reveal, through their hopeful stories, that they have faith in a better future.

Miller and Larsen state that talking about hope, that is, using the language of hope intentionally, helps to foster hope in people. Several other researchers agree that hope stories and conversations may elicit hope in difficult situations. The challenge that we, Brazilian researchers and teacher educators, face is to bring hope into our courses and classrooms and thus help to enhance hope in the lives of our pre-service and in-service teachers.

According to Dalton-Puffer, discourse may create community. As such, participants in a discourse community work towards shared cognitive and affective states. In a hopeful discourse community, therefore, participants would all become more hopeful. This is the challenge that this paper reveals to us: to start talking about hope in our contexts and help to construct a hopeful environment for ourselves and for those around us.

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A Reflection on the Challenges for Teaching Genres in University Settings

Antonia Dilamar Araújo
Universidade Estadual do Ceará

Introduction

For almost thirty years, genre has increasingly been a central issue for both first language and second language writing studies and teaching. Scholars recognize that contemporary genre theory goes beyond descriptions of text types to the consideration of a more complex social construct which shapes and is shaped by human activity (Tardy 79-101). With a large body of descriptive studies, writers have now an understanding of the ways in which different elements like textual forms, goals, and elements of situation interact with individuals, communities, and institutions to give rise to forms of communication we call genres. We teachers have witnessed an emergence of genre perspectives, a profusion of the term in composition textbooks, and a great number of publications on genre studies; and genre has become a concern of writing pedagogy. Genre has therefore become the core of debate among scholars, teachers, and professionals of other areas of knowledge. But despite this increasing interest in genre theory and its applications, it seems that it continues to be a challenge for language teaching.

Genre as a challenge for language teaching implies teachers have an entire understanding of the nature of genre in L2/FL writing including the complexity of genres, the skills for writing genres in the modern world, and some knowledge of genre instruction. On this process of reflection, several questions about how to deal with genres in FL classrooms have come to my mind: What is involved in the production of genres that make them so

complex? What knowledge does a student need to have to write texts recognizable as instances of genres? In what ways do reading and writing genres become a challenge for language teaching?

In an attempt to address these questions, several authors have been looked at, including Swales, Ann Johns, Hyland, Paltridge, Tardy, Silva, Leki, Kei Matsuda, who have focused on L2 writing and generated a large body of studies and comments on a number of relevant theoretical and practical issues on genres in school contexts. This article attempts, therefore, to reflect on genres as challenges for teaching academic writing in English as a foreign language. As it is not possible to cover every issue concerning the theme, the focus of the article will be limited to examining three actual issues deemed of great importance: the variety of genre perspectives and traditions, genre nature and complexity, and finally, genre approaches to instruction.

This article is organized in three parts: 1) a theoretical part in which the three issues about genre knowledge deemed as challenges are discussed, 2) practical applications, and 3) final remarks.

1. Theoretical background

Writing in either first language or second language is one the most difficult tasks a learner can face through situated practice in academic contexts. Many scholars and teachers recognize that writing in any language is a complex task which consists of taking into account components such as purpose, audience, textual features, style, context of writing, content knowledge, and linguistic knowledge. This complexity constrains the production of any text and becomes a challenge especially for novice writers in settings of learning and classroom practice. On starting college and university, both undergraduate and graduate students are asked to participate in complex cultural systems that require them to be literate in different sorts of writing. They are challenged to learn how to write texts according to their specific disciplinary fields in order to fulfill academic expectations and succeed in the courses they take. One challenge of this complex system is that students need to gain competence in how to use language within the fields. In addition to the language, they then need to learn different content, orientation, and methodology in the courses of each discipline in academic

settings. And for every discipline, students must learn to read and write a system of genres (Bazerman 309-39) that follow the conventions and styles according to the culture of the discipline. This is one of the challenges for the teachers: to provide appropriate knowledge for students in such domains in a teaching methodology that allows them to write as expert writers. When teachers look at the whole complexity of the theme, they realize that the challenges are great.

As part of my concerns with reading, writing, and instruction of academic genres in a foreign language in university settings, I have paid attention to the students' difficulties in meeting teachers' expectations when writing the genres that circulate in the university settings such as abstracts, essays, reviews, research articles, and research projects as a response to classroom assignments. In order to write appropriately to the context of use, the students need not only to master the foreign language, but also to be aware of the target audience, the communicative purpose of the genre, the conventions socially constructed by the discourse community that will influence linguistic choices and their effect on the reader. In this article, I discuss at least three kinds of challenges for language teachers: the variety of genre perspectives, the complexity of writing genres, and writing pedagogy.

1.1 Variety of genre concepts and perspectives for teaching

The first issue is related to the variety of concepts and perspectives of genre that teachers and students should share. The term genre has been interpreted in a variety of ways by experts from a number of perspectives and traditions. The most known and influential perspectives for language teachers and researchers in Brazil are: 1) the *Sydney School*, based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, which has developed research and well-established pedagogies at a number of academic levels (e.g. Christie, Martin and Rothery, Martin); 2) *The English for Specific Purposes* (ESP) and *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP), in which the most famous name is John Swales, internationally recognized for Genre Analysis and for his model for analyzing genres based on "rhetorical moves" (see Bhatia, Dudley-Evans and St John, and others); and 3) *the New Rhetoric* group, mainly North American scholars, for whom genre knowledge has been considered to be

primarily social, embedded in the community and context of writer and audience (see Bazerman, Freedman and Medway, Russell, Prior, among others).

Flowerdew, in an attempt to categorize genre theorists in a simpler taxonomy, distinguished them into two groups: linguistic and non-linguistic ones. The linguistic group is represented by ESP and the Australian school “who apply theories of functional grammar and discourse, focusing on the lexico-grammatical and rhetorical realization of communicative purposes embodied in a genre” (91). The non-linguistic group represented by the New Rhetoric scholars “is more focused on situational context – the purposes and functions of genres and the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviors of the members of the discourse community in which genres are situated” (91). Thus these different traditions become a challenge for language teaching since teaching genre implies the teacher should adopt one or a combination of perspectives they believe in and this perspective will influence the choice of appropriate pedagogy for teaching.

From these perspectives, a well accepted view of genres is that advocated by socio-rhetorical scholars (Miller, Swales, Bazerman, Paltridge, Devitt, Hyland, just to cite a few) on which genres are “ways in which people ‘get things done’ through their use of language in particular contexts” (Paltridge, qtd. in Johns et al 235). Genres are what people recognize to be part of their social practices. Considering the school context, genres are “socially-approved ways in which students show what they know, what they can do, and what they have learned in a course of study” (Paltridge, qtd. in Johns et al 235). So, in writing genres, writers use language in particular ways according to the aim and purpose of the genre, observing the relationship between the writer and the audience, previous experiences with the genre to produce a new text, and the expectations of the context in which the genre is being produced. All these aspects together mean that every instance of a genre does not need to be the same. This explains why genres vary in their typicality. Araújo (forthcoming), for example, found out that academic book reviews written by graduate students in university settings in the same discipline can vary in response to the task that has been assigned by the professor, due to the students’ sensitivity to the situation, values and expectations of those who are judging the effectiveness of the genre in a school context.

1.2 Complexity of genres

The second challenge is related to the notion that genres are complex, especially written genres. This means that although individual researchers need to limit the scope of their studies in terms of studying textual genres, social actions, communities of practice, power structures or the modalities in which genres operate, genre knowledge is multidimensional and includes domains such as formal, rhetorical, process, and subject-matter/topic knowledge, as claimed by Tardy in an article co-authored with Johns et al (see Figure 1).

According to Tardy, for experts, these domains interact and overlap, allowing them to manipulate genres for particular purposes. As for novice writers, they face difficulty in seeing interactions among the several domains and tend to focus on one or two dimensions (such as generic moves or lexicogrammatical features) and exclude others. Once the students become familiar with some knowledge domains, that knowledge becomes automatic and they are able to use other generic components.

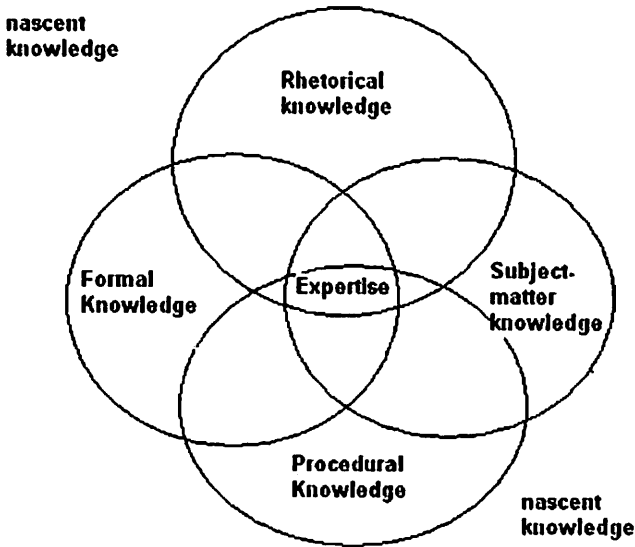


FIGURE 1 - Model of genre knowledge (Tardy, qtd in Johns 234-49).

Another important aspect to be taken into account concerning genre as a challenge for language teaching and linked to these dimensions is the examination of cultural differences in language and communication (contrastive rhetoric). As English is increasingly becoming the main international language of communication, education, travel, and business, there is a tendency to consider the notion of culture and cultural differences as if they were neutral and permanent truths, instead of seeing them as dynamic and situated in relations of power and ideologies, as claimed by Paltridge ("Genre in the Classroom" 119). Paltridge (in an interview given to Johns and cited in "Crossing the Boundaries") by citing Bloor and Bloor also advocates that cultural expectations and culturally appropriate behavior can not be described in terms of linguistic models. He agrees that teachers should refine students' cross-cultural awareness in order to help them to be able to express themselves and establish a personal stance as they choose the genres to communicate.

Tardy, in an interview given to Ann Johns for the article "Crossing the Boundaries," has suggested that her model of genre knowledge may help foreign or second language learners to examine how different genre dimensions interact (239). The challenge for language teachers is to be aware of the four domains and provide activities in the classroom that might help students use the multiple domains simultaneously and build a complex view of genre. As an illustration of the importance of mastering these domains, in a recent investigation conducted in 2006 and 2007 in which a group of fourteen Brazilian graduate students from the State University of Ceará (UECE, Brazil) were observed in their writing of book reviews as assignments to the classroom showed to have difficulty with the writing of this genre, especially from rhetorical and procedural dimensions when compared to eight American graduate students from The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Brazilian students demonstrated in their texts that they had poorly developed evaluative skills, although they answered in the survey that they were aware of the conventions and interactions among the dimensions.

By examining the compositions of Brazilian students compared to American ones in the writing of book reviews, Brazilian students were divided into three groups. The first group (four students), who seemed to be unaware of a need to be polite in the reviews employed straight critical comments. They did not show any concern for saving the author's face or

even to show solidarity with the author. The second group (six students), who intermingled praise and criticism, showed much more consciousness of the social purpose of the genre, even when responding to a class assignment, and they presented similar features to those of American students' writing. The third group (four students), on the other hand, seemed not to have understood what politeness means, but they wrote reviews with more praise expressions than criticisms. Their texts tended to be neutral descriptions of aims, organization, content, and a brief and global evaluation at the end. This difference may indicate that although they acknowledge that academic reviews are typifications of actions, there is still a lack of ability and awareness of some dimensions of genre knowledge (rhetorical and procedural) to highlight important aspects of the article in their texts.

For Brazilian students, academic reviews written for the teacher or as task to the classroom are only a way to show content knowledge. Those who expressed straight criticism revealed that academic reviews, even when written for the teacher/classroom, besides showing content knowledge must also show their critical views. Such students seemed not to take into account 'the affective and addressee-oriented meanings' to fulfill the social purpose of the genre (Hyland, "Praise and Criticism" 45). For those who intermingled praise with criticism, their work showed much more consciousness of the social purpose of the genre, even when responding to a class assignment.

On the other hand, Anglo-American students' reviews, in responding to a class assignment, seemed to be more aware of the social purpose of the genre by providing not only an overview of the book, but also by pointing out strengths and weaknesses. Their texts showed a balanced use of strategies to convey personal judgments revealing their awareness of the need to create an interpersonal stake by signaling their positive and negative comments. Their writing correlated to their surveyed responses given to the questionnaire in that they commented on their perceptions and familiarity with the writing of book reviews. Although they were writing book reviews for class, they also had in mind submitting them for publication. Their writing revealed a control of formal, rhetorical, procedural, and content dimensions.

The differences between these two groups of students in expressing evaluations may be related partly to their previous experiences in reading and writing reviews, and partly to the way they were oriented to work through

assignments (here it would be necessary to examine in detail the classroom context, teachers' explanations, and materials provided), and in part to their understanding of how they must respond to their written assignments for grades (see Araújo, forthcoming). The majority of students in both groups revealed not having much experience with the writing of book reviews and also reported that they had learned to write reviews through exposure to systematic instruction in the classroom and by reading and analyzing reviews in journals.

Although the focus of my study was not on the teaching of academic genres, the analyses revealed that there is much more to do to help students to understand what is involved in the act of writing typified texts. They should be aware, as Freedman asserts, that genres “not only respond to specific contexts but also reshape those contexts in the process of responding to them” (“Beyond the Text” 766). But how can we teachers help students manipulate the complex act of writing genres? What pedagogies or strategies of teaching can teachers use to empower students to write appropriate texts recognizable by members of the community as genres? This is the third issue the teachers face when teaching genres in the classroom.

1.3 Approaches to genre instruction

By looking at the literature of ESL writing instruction (Kroll, Leki, Silva, Paltridge, Raimes, Matsuda, among others) we have seen that the historical development of a second language pedagogy includes a variety of writing approaches. Matsuda (17-20) shows that different pedagogical approaches to writing range from *writing as sentence-level structure* (whose focus is on controlled composition with sentence-level grammar exercises that did not help students to produce original sentences), to *writing as discourse-level structure* (the focus is on rhetoric defined as the organizational structure and influenced by discourse analysis and text linguistics, looking at the structures of written discourse in various languages and their possible influences on L2 texts), to *writing as process* (introduced by Zamel, who emphasizes the view of writing as a process of developing organization and meaning through stages such as invention, writing multiple drafts, and feedback), and to *writing as language use in context* (introduced by ESP, Johns and Dudley Evans and by EAP, Jordan) that emphasizes the preparation of students for writing in academic discourse communities, providing an

understanding of the various contexts of writing to be developed. These pedagogical approaches are limited in their focus. They were based on different concepts of writing and on different aspects of second language writing.

In Brazil, there is a tendency of foreign language teachers to adopt the product approach to writing when providing genre-based instruction in the classroom, in that students are exposed to model texts and they are supposed to analyze the rhetorical and language features. Students are asked to imitate the texts in activities without a specific and real purpose and audience. Even the teachers who have focused their teaching on the process approach, they do not take into account the purpose, the audiences and students' needs. These approaches have been criticized by Freedman, Bleich and Bazerman who have claimed among other reasons that genres are studied without considering the complex, dynamic sociocultural contexts that give rise to them, that the study of genres has been located outside of the living situations of their use and that the understanding of genres is limited to discursive features easily recognized by writers at the surface of text.

In addition to these criticisms, another concern by scholars is how teachers can provide good teaching if they are not native speakers of English, if they teach in a community in which the target language is not spoken and many times they do not use regularly the genre they are teaching. How can teachers who believe that genres are social and changing processes provide an instruction without being too prescriptivist, without transmitting the idea of genres as static forms? This is a great challenge for now.

2. Practical suggestions for teaching genre

The issues raised in this article and the scenario for teaching genre seem still to require much reflection and further investigation. Although some textbooks for teaching genres based on different perspectives are available for international students (Swales and Feak's *Academic Writing for Graduate Students – A Course for Nonnative Speakers of English* – is one example), there is still a lack of good books in this area. It is possible that the solution for language teachers is to engage students into ethnographic activities to genres they need to learn by assisting students in associating communicative actions to their contexts and stimulating students to write

texts within these contexts. Some authors (Swales, Hyland, Paltridge, Tardy, Reiff, Devitt and Bawarshi) argue that ethnographic approaches to genres are beneficial to students because they include an understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which genres occur. Reiff (qtd in Johns et al) in advocating the ethnography use for teaching genres states that teachers may help students to recognize genres as “rhetorical responses to and reflections of the cultures and immediate situations in which genres are used so that the students can have access, understand and write within these cultures and situations” (240).

Tardy’s genre model (see Figure 1 in this article), if applied to ethnographic activities, would involve students first in procedural knowledge, by asking students to collect samples of genres, exploring unfamiliar or new genres and so gaining access to powerful institutional genres they need to read and write in school, work and other social contexts. Then students would move to rhetorical knowledge, followed by questions about subject matter and formal knowledge. This way, following ethnographic principles, students may be asked to observe the linguistic interactions of a group, participate in the group, and interview those experts who read and write in a genre. These activities may give students access to authentic and real contexts for language use and an understanding of the cultural and textual practices.

Devitt, Reiff and Bawarshi in their textbook *Scenes of Writing: Strategies for Composing with Genres* have developed strategies for students of both L1 and L2 analyzing genres through a mix of engaging ethnographic activities outside and inside the classroom. Figure 2 synthesizes a proposal for introducing students into the complexities of genre analysis which includes the four dimensions by beginning with procedural knowledge (students are asked to observe genres in action, interview participants in the situation about their genres and collect possible samples) followed by rhetorical knowledge (students are guided to examine the patterns of language or genres embedded in a group or culture, and look at the conventions), and then subject matter and formal knowledge. At the end, students are asked to write within the genre of the community they have studied or to produce a variation of the genre. This approach seems to me helpful because it allows students to become aware of what is involved in the production of genres within a community, besides developing their critical and thinking skills.

1. Collect Samples of the genre

Students try to gather samples from more than one place for analysis so that they get a more accurate picture of the complexity of the genre. The more samples of the genre they collect, the more they will be able to notice patterns within the genre.

2. Identify the Scene and Describe the Situation in which the Genre is used

Students analyze the larger scene in which the genre is used and seek answers to questions about the genre's situation: setting (where the genre appears), subject (what topics, issues, ideas, the genre addresses), participants (who reads and writes the genre), and purposes (why writers the genre in focus).

3. Identify and Describe Patterns in the Genre's Features

In this stage, students are invited to observe the recurrent features the samples share such as the content, sorts of examples and evidence, rhetorical appeals, rhetorical structure, format, length, types of sentences, diction, writer's voice.

4. Analyze what these Patterns reveal about the Situation and Scene

The last step students analyze the rhetorical patterns about the genre, its situation, and the scene in which it is used.

FIGURE 2 - Simplified Guidelines for Analyzing Genres (Reiff, Devitt and Bawarshi 93-94).

3. Final remarks

In this article, I have attempted to reflect on the main challenges teachers may face when teaching genres for language students. These are varied and complex and this article has not covered all the issues the topic involves. But if teachers are willing to overcome these difficulties, they need to have a clear concept of genre in mind and choose one coherent instructional approach to it that helps students to develop generic competence (knowledge about language, about social context and purpose and skills in using language). According to Bhatia (*Worlds*), this competence will help students to produce texts that respond to both the how and what of particular communicative situations.

It is important to highlight that the advantages of an ethnographically based approach to genres are in its focus on social context and communicative purpose. Hence, teachers should be careful when deciding what genres are important for students to learn in university settings, how to engage them

in activities through the stages of the instruction, and how to expose students to real settings in which they can understand complex social relations, expectations, assumptions in order to produce appropriate exemplars of texts to respond to different rhetorical situations in their social lives.

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Genres in English Language Course Books: Teaching Words and Images

Barbara Hemais

Pontifícia Universidade Católica-Rio

Introduction

The notion that genre awareness can help learners gain a solid awareness of language and prepare them to be successful in communicative practices in everyday, professional, and academic settings underlies the belief in a genre-based approach to EFL teaching. It is thought that, from the exposure to genres through teaching materials, learners will build knowledge of linguistic features, genre purposes, audience expectations, and discursive practices preferred in discourse communities.

One important classroom genre is the EFL course book, which contains a number of genres, or sub-genres, such as letters, advertisements, postcards, forms, news articles, and Internet pages. Some of the sub-genres are primarily in written form and some are images. In fact, even the primarily written genres have graphic features such as font type, size and page layout, and these features have become more and more visually appealing in recent course book publications. It can be said that the visuality in course books reflects the visual nature and meanings in much of the academic, professional and everyday practices in our modern life. The perception of the importance of visual knowledge has prompted the argument by Terry Royce that learners need to develop a multimodal communicative competence (192) in order to be enabled to deal with the demands they encounter in the use of English.

Although it seems to be the case that our society is “an increasingly image-saturated society where paintings, photographs, and electronic

images depend on one another for their meanings” (Sturken and Cartwright 11), we need to understand more fully the meanings of images in settings of language learning. One way of doing this is to examine genres that have strong visual characteristics and that are present in the materials used in English language teaching-learning. The study presented in this paper investigates the visual characteristics of genres in an English language course book and seeks to address the question of how genres are presented in a course book and in particular how the visual features and meanings of genres are explored. I will also discuss the challenges that teachers face in a genre-based approach to language teaching.

In this paper, the term “visual” is used to refer simply to advertisements, Internet pages, postcards, and other genres where the image (photo, drawing, icons) appear with or without written text and where meaning depends to large extent on the image. “Written genre” will be used to refer to reproductions of forms, letters, news articles, for instance, where verbal text accounts for much of the meaning in the genre. This perspective on genres in teaching materials is multimodal in the sense that both graphic and iconic modes of meaning are analyzed; other semiotic systems such as sound, gesture, and color are beyond the scope of this paper.

A genre approach to English language teaching: understanding course books

Course books tend to have a number of genres that serve as secondary support for teaching and learning and others that are used in direct relation to a language topic. Postcards, news articles, and forms, for example, may illustrate a topic for discussion (travel or occupational needs) or they may be used to allow learners to identify and practice language items.

But there is the question of not how genres are handled in the process of teaching and learning, but of their importance as part of the process that enables learners to become active participants in discourse practices for academic, professional and social purposes. Genres are taken to be fundamental in our social actions: “What happens in society in terms of interaction is by means of genres” (Biasi-Rodrigues 1). In relation to culture, “it is the plane of Genre that organizes our social actions and interaction into meaningful wholes” (Ventola and Kaltenbacher 2).

If communication happens through genres, then genre knowledge needs to be a part of teaching and learning in foreign language situations. But what is genre knowledge? According to Bhatia, knowing a genre actually includes genre recognition, understanding of genre structure and linguistic code, awareness of genre context, and knowledge for producing the genre for professional, academic or social purposes (136).

One of the fundamental genres in many language classrooms is the course book, and knowing this genre involves understanding its function in the context of teaching and learning. From the perspective of first-language learning in formal educational settings, where the main genre is the textbook, research has brought some insights that may be pertinent to the foreign language course book. The textbook is seen as an element that is integrated into the process of education, and it is identified as a genre that functions communicatively as a source of instruction and information about how people do things in society (Davies 1).

From a socio-historical view of the textbook, it is a genre that assures that learning actually happens in school (Soares 55), where knowledge undergoes a process of selection and organization for the purposes of teaching and learning. The textbook is the tool for teaching the knowledge that is understood to be necessary for learner participation in society. The case of the ELT course book would seem to be similar to this. What needs to be learned about language is organized and sequenced in the book, in other words, "didacticized" (Soares 62), in language topics or grammar points (verb tense or adjective order, for example). The material to be learned is arranged and illustrated in a series of sub-genres composed of postcards, forms, and news stories, for instance, and also vocabulary exercises, grammar explanations, tests and other classroom genres that are part of foreign language materials. Here the focus is on the genres represented in the course book, not the course book itself as genre.

Schneuwly and Dolz have a similar view of genres in school. These authors understand that the classroom genres such as narratives, reviews, summaries, and dialogues are not just ways of communicating but also objects of teaching and learning (76). For students, genres are language practices, with learning objectives. The authors further argue that in the classroom there is an inversion in which communication nearly disappears and the genre becomes a linguistic form to be mastered (76).

A similar perspective on genres in classroom settings comes from studies of systems of activities. In a paper that offers an application of activity theory to a classroom setting, David Russell analyzes secondary and university courses in cell biology. Russell explains that classroom genres are “genres that develop in educational activity systems to operationalize teaching and learning” (15). For students and professors, classroom genres carry out activities in the genre system of the university. Students see themselves as being involved in the goals of formal schooling, translated as receiving grades and eventually a diploma. In a similar manner, the course books used in an EFL classroom could be said to do this: they help realize the activity of language learning.

One concern that is often voiced about teaching with genres is that classroom materials do not prepare learners for social activity outside the classroom, as for example the composition that is only written to be corrected by the teacher. Classroom exercises have been criticized for not allowing learners to understand the production of genres in social and professional use. However, Russell makes a distinction between the purposes of a classroom genre and a professional genre: “A classroom genre is a translation of some professional genre, a way of changing its direction (motive) from that of the research lab or professional application to a pedagogical use, a means of redirecting or pointing (some) students toward (and sometimes some away from) the activity system” (16). Thus the purpose of a classroom genre is not to help learners perform in professional capacities; instead, a classroom genre should help learners become involved in the language learning system or in recognized language learning practices used in a discourse community of teacher and learners.

This perspective on genres in classroom settings may help us to rethink the perception that genres are presented inadequately in classroom materials. From some studies of EFL course books, it seems that the knowledge that is selected, organized and sequenced for the genres may not reflect their full range of characteristics. Format and linguistic conventions may be adapted so much that the genre shown on the page is not very representative of the genre used in a social or professional situation. Genres may also be presented in an incomplete form in course books, for example, doctor-patient interview dialogues that fail to include the greeting or the thank-you, or the customer-salesman dialogues that lack the discourse elements

about the payment for goods or the goods handover (Ventola and Kaltenbacher 5). With this kind of representation of genres, it may happen that the learner will not understand the structure, purpose or linguistic features of the genre and will perhaps not realize how people handle the genre in social practices. It can also be imagined that the learner may grasp that something is missing and, at this point, begin to lose confidence in the book, in the teacher, or in the institution.

In essence, the criticism is that classroom activities can be unrelated to “real life” practices, and the apparently decontextualized teaching materials lose some of their meaning since they are removed from their original social or professional contexts. However, Russell again points to an application of activity theory concerning texts in the classroom. “Activity theory suggests that students do not perceive texts as context-free; it is schooling that is the ‘context,’ the activity system that these genres primarily mediate” (23). In other words, learners understand that the classroom setting is the appropriate context for texts, since this setting provides a reason for the texts being studied, exercised, and perhaps tested.

A multimodal approach to using EFL course books

Just as an awareness of the functions of genres can serve the teaching and learning process, an awareness of the meanings of the varied languages in course books can reveal the complexity of meanings and meaning-making that has become a prominent part of teaching materials and of many of our contemporary social practices. The perspective of multimodality helps us observe the characteristics that formatting, photos, graphics, colors, drawings, and layout all have for making meanings. This paper will be limited to dealing with images and visual awareness, as other languages such as sound and gesture are beyond the scope of the paper.

Multimodal awareness is thought to be more and more important in contemporary society; it is part of what needs to be learned in foreign language education, one of the competencies that need to be mastered. Images are related to written text, as there is an interface of visual and linguistic meanings in contemporary media. So, just as learners are led to understand the purpose and rationale behind a written text, they also need to understand the intentions that inform visual representations and meanings in course

book images. This includes an awareness of the purposes of images such as text boxes and illustrations, just as much as adapted genres such as menus.

Whereas visuals are not new in course books, in the last several decades the design, techniques of production, and quantity and variety of elements have lent to course books a visual complexity and a high visual appeal that goes beyond the images themselves. In relation to images, although books seem to depend on the visual appeal, the purpose of the images is not always clearly defined in the support materials for the book. Since images are predominant in most of our social practice, their presence in course books seems to reflect the post-modern image-laden society.

It is understood that images have their own meaning-making capacity, their own ways of creating meaning; they can support meanings expressed in verbal language and they can realize meanings that words cannot. Words and images can make different meanings, or rather, as Kress and van Leeuwen understand it, the image realizes the same systems of meanings as words do, but the image does so “by means of its own specific forms, and independently” (17). In a similar view, Gillian Rose argues that images need to be taken seriously, since they do not just reflect their context: “Visual representations have their own effects” (15). It is worth examining ELT course books to ascertain whether the same is true of images in this kind of text.

If we are to take images seriously in their pedagogic function, we need to examine what meanings are offered in the images on the pages of the books, whether the meanings are explored in the activities in the book, how the images relate to the meanings in verbal texts in the book, and, finally, what the images actually contribute to the learning process.

Students’ perceptions of genre usefulness

One question that deserves examining is related to students’ perceptions of their own use of genres and their academic and professional needs for genres. In genre studies, one consideration is often whether the course materials attend to students’ needs, which seems not to be a straightforward matter. In an attempt to understand this question better, I examined two genres (a job résumé and a homepage) in a survey of learners’ perceptions of them. The learners, all young adults, were in an upper-intermediate level English course. Table 1 summarizes the learners’ responses.

TABLE 1 - Survey of Learner Perceptions of Genres in a Course Book.

Question	Résumé	Home Page
The genre needs to be learned	11	6
Learning the genre is not necessary	2	7
Activities enhance genre awareness	13	1
Activities do not help genre awareness	1	10

Fourteen students responded to a questionnaire in class, with answers written in English or Portuguese. Some students left some answers blank. The language of the questions did not include the term “genre,” but instead used “résumé” or “homepage” directly. As Table 1 shows, the students showed different reactions to the two genres. Most of them felt that the résumé needs explicit instruction, but only around half of them thought they need to be taught the homepage genre. As for the exercises in the book, nearly all said the exercises help them understand the résumé, whereas almost all the participants said they did not learn more about the homepage from the exercises in the book.

It would seem that what these learners are saying is that a genre needs to be learned if it is related to potential or real professional or academic needs, in other words, situations where there are high expectations about performance and demonstration of genre and disciplinary knowledge. On the other hand, a genre like the homepage may not be helpful, or may not need explicit instruction, if it will not be used for a professional or academic need and if it is already familiar from personal and social practices. This result might be interpreted as indicating that such genres are not perceived as being part of the language learning activity system, as described by Russell.

So far this paper has addressed questions related to English language teaching from a genre perspective, focusing on genres that have strong visual features. An attempt has been made to bring to light the challenges of using genre-based teaching. Next, this paper will illustrate the questions by analyzing two instances of genres in one English language course book.

The genres of advertising and tourist guidebooks

Ads are often used in language teaching materials because they are appealing for various reasons. They are characterized by contemporary language, cultural information, visual presentation of contexts, and brevity; they also can be motivating for students and can lead students to reflect on their own consumer habits (Picken 250). In the course book examined for this paper, there is a unit that deals with ads. The listening and discussion activities are reproduced below.

- 1a) How does each of the advertisements below try to appeal to us?
b) Have you ever bought or would you buy any of the products?
- 2a) Listen to these short extracts from a discussion about advertising. One of these is not referred to. Which is it?
- an advantage of advertising
 - music in ads
 - the kind of people ads are aimed at
 - images that make us uncomfortable
 - the ability of advertising to make you choose a product
- b) Discuss answers to these questions:
1. Is there anything they say you agree or don't agree with? Give reasons.
 2. Think of your three favourite advertisements. Which medium (TV, print, radio) is each in? What makes them attractive to you (e.g., the humour)?
 3. Does advertising make you buy things? If so, what?
 4. Do you mind being manipulated by advertisements? Give reasons.

One of the ads on the page is for a Nissan car model, and its high visual meaning is gained through simplicity. It has a spare visual composition made up of two stylized cars, each outlined with a thick black line, and also the Nissan logo in the bottom right corner. The verbal text includes a phrase describing the model (“The roomy new Micra”), placed next to the logo, and also two single words placed on top of each car. These are the key to the visual meaning. The word “outside” is placed over the small car and “inside” is placed over the large car, conveying the idea that spatial meanings are being inverted, favoring the concept of small cars with large interiors.

The listening and discussion activities seem to focus on knowledge of visuals as social practice, not just as language learning tools. The questions

about the manipulative force of ads (“How does each of the advertisements below try to appeal to us?” and “Do you mind being manipulated by advertisements? Give reasons.”) indicate that learners are positioned as users of ads, not as language learners. Finally, the questions explore the genre by asking students to consider the force of ads from a critical perspective. Thus, curiously, the discussion questions do not draw attention to the use of visual and verbal language in the Nissan ad (“inside” and “outside” and the two cars), although reflection on these two kinds of meaning would help learners understand the manipulative force of the ad.

However, images sometimes seem to merely complement the verbal text. This can be seen in a classroom activity using the tourist guidebook genre. A page from the guidebook shows a picture of an attractive beach resort with a highly appealing verbal description of it. Along side this is a letter written by a tourist that visits the beach. The two verbal texts are reproduced below.

Albufeira, whose beautiful sandy beaches are among the best in Europe, is cooled in the hot summer months by refreshing Atlantic breezes. This favourite destination for the British remains the Algarve's most well known resort, fashionable and utterly charming, and retains a unique fishing village atmosphere. You can stroll around the Old town in the morning when it's quiet, take a leisurely walk past the whitewashed fishermen's cottages nearby, set in narrow twisted streets, or sit in the cafes in the evening, watching street musicians and buskers as the town comes alive.

We like Albufeira a lot. The beaches are fantastic. Very sandy. It's quite hot - I spend a lot of the day sleeping and drinking ice-cold milk-shakes - but you don't really notice the heat when you're on the beach because there's a lovely sea breeze. Last night we went for a walk around the town Very fashionable - everyone was out in their Gucci gear - but even so the town still manages to hang on to its oldy worldly fishing-village atmosphere. We spent a bit of time in a café listening to some absolutely fantastic street musicians and generally watching the world go by. Nadia thought she was in heaven!

The image is not referred to in any of the items in the activities. Instead, what is focused on is the contrast between the two genres: tourist guidebook and personal letter, and in fact the tasks seem soundly thought out. The questions in the tasks draw attention to differences in purpose, audience, genre expectations, language structure and lexical choices. Some of the questions are reproduced below.

- 1 What are the general aims of a guidebook in contrast to a personal letter to a friend describing a place?
 - a) In the extracts below find examples of:
 1. Phrases with adjectives
 2. Intensifying adverbs (e.g., *entirely*)
 3. Different sentence structures (e.g., passives, relative clauses, parenthetical statements – extra ideas added to the main sentence)
 4. Prepositional phrases (e.g., *in the heart of, close to*)
 - b) Compare the extracts. How do they differ in style? Which has more complex sentences?
- 2a) What do you expect a tourist guide description of a place to include (e.g., where the place is, its history)?

In the activities for these genres, what is worth observing are the questions that ask the students to consider the genre contrasts. The questions call attention to the aims of a brochure and a personal letter (question 1), as well as to the linguistic and stylistic features of both genres (questions 1a) and 1b). In other words, students are encouraged to notice and think about the characteristics of the two genres. This may invite genre knowledge in the sense of recognition, understanding of genre structure and linguistic features, and perhaps awareness of the context of each genre. However, the visual feature of the image in the tourist guidebook is excluded, and thus the chance for learning about the meaning of an image is unexplored.

Final considerations

This paper has focused on the understanding of genres in classroom settings. More specifically, it has offered some initial considerations on some

visual features of classroom genres. It has been noticed that, as is true of other kinds of texts, there are various relations between words and images.

One observation to be made is that, in the examples analyzed here, the pedagogical activities seem to hold a predominant role in organizing the learning that is to happen. Learners are led to see both language and genre through the activities. The activities direct and limit the learners' attention, as they indicate what is to be noticed on the page. In addition, the activities show how the genre fits into the learning context or the activity system of the course. It is true that students may see other things instead – or as well – but what may happen is that students' practices of looking may not be privileged in the teaching and learning setting, in the case that they see something that is different from the pedagogical focus in the book.

This observation has implications not only for the challenge teachers face when using course materials but also for learners development in terms of the recognition and understanding of genres. That is, a course book task may, from what we have seen, guide the learner toward a particular language point, whether it be related to genre knowledge or not, or it may present a reduced version of a genre. Learners, in this case, may (or may not) understand that the language learning experience is more controlled than they imagined and is about tasks rather than about genres.

The English language course book is part of the language education process, and in fact in EFL settings the course book is usually central in course planning and language learning. It is also a source of instruction about discourse practices. It can be said that the course book assures that learning will happen, as the contents of language topics in the book provide a general plan for teaching. In addition, it does seem that what needs to be learned is “didacticized,” so that genres, being removed from their original context, have pedagogical functions.

Classroom genres operationalize teaching and learning, as they allow for the learning of vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing, and a number of other language goals. As a result, genres are part of course goals, as they lead to grades and to students' passing (or failing) a course and eventually to a certificate or diploma. But there is still the concern that students move from the classroom into social and professional settings in which they must participate. The challenge for teaching English language would seem to be to identify the teacher's role in the transfer of pedagogical

genre knowledge to social and professional knowledge of genres. It should be mentioned that the teacher would not be alone in this challenge; it is the teacher, though, that would be instrumental in helping the transfer of genre knowledge to happen.

Other questions remain. The present paper has discussed issues and perspectives concerning EFL course books and visual features in genres specifically. But some of the concerns related to visual features are also pertinent to genre questions more broadly, in relation to English language teaching.

- Does the treatment of images in genres favor the building of knowledge of language, purpose, expectations and preferred discourse practices?
- Should we teach images in genres or awareness of the visuality of genres?
- What is the relation between images and verbal language in course book genres?
- What do images in course book genres contribute to learning? What do genres contribute to learning?

I suggest that a challenge for using genres in EFL teaching and learning is to find answers to the questions above through teaching practices that are based on what we already know about genres in the classroom and that take us beyond this.

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Slang and the Internet

Connie Eble

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

In keeping with the ABRAPUI conference theme of “New Challenges in Language and Literature,” this essay shows that the vocabulary type called *slang* has adapted to the new social contexts created by the Internet and continues to serve the same purposes in the twenty-first century as it has since the eighteenth century when slang was first described for English as the vocabulary of underworld groups. Although the social purposes of slang may well be close to the same, the social contexts are vastly different. Scholarship that is to describe slang accurately in the twenty-first century must be attuned to both what is old about slang and what is new.

The study of slang has always faced challenges in the academy because the entrenched language variety of higher education throughout the world is the standard, written variety of a language. And that register excludes slang, thereby assigning it to an inferior position. In western Europe until the eighteenth century, even choosing to write for serious purposes in a vernacular rather than in Latin cast suspicion on the educational credentials of the writer. At major British and American universities, the reading and study of literature written in English became part of the curriculum only in the nineteenth century. For English, the register preferred in the expository writing of the educated in all fields of study has included a high proportion of Latinate and bookish words, and little tolerance of regional and colloquial vocabulary, including slang. Thus it is not surprising that regional varieties of English and vocabulary associated with everyday life or minority groups were perceived as curious and perhaps amusing or quaint but not to be used in serious writing and too trivial to study.

In the systematic study of language now called linguistics, the shift from old-fashioned philology to structuralism to generative grammar in the academy did little to change the lack of interest in slang or improve its status. With few exceptions, the best studies of slang were done by lexicographers and others outside the academy. The leading journals in linguistics throughout the twentieth century almost never published articles on slang (the exception was *American Speech* begun in 1925 and now the official journal of the American Dialect Society). The development in the twentieth century of the disciplines called the social sciences – e.g., anthropology, psychology, sociology, and social history – likewise resulted in little interest in slang. Across the disciplines that sought to bring scientific objectivity to the study of human behavior, slang vocabulary was considered an embellishment to language, a non-essential and accidental component of the lexicon that could be ignored with little loss to the understanding of human behavior. The development of sociolinguistics over the past half century, however, has helped legitimize the study of slang. Sociolinguistics correlates variation and change in linguistic form with social factors. Because slang is essentially a linguistic expression of social affiliation, this type of lexis is central to the concerns of sociolinguistics. Although slang studies do not have to fight for legitimacy in sociolinguistics, the standard controlled fieldwork of sociolinguistics in which factors of gender, race, class, and age are correlated with features of language does not readily lend itself to the study of slang. The social dimensions of slang are not necessarily like those that can be attributed to an internal variable like loss of final consonant clusters. Slang may be better explained, for example, in a social network model. One of the greatest challenges to scholarship in slang is to fit slang into the current conversations going on in sociolinguistics about such topics as identity, power, community formation, stereotyping, discrimination and the like.

This essay first outlines the general characteristics of slang, with particular reference to the slang of American college students. Then it examines the use of slang on the Internet, mainly the World Wide Web. In Internet use, slang has successfully crossed from oral to written realization. Because of its primarily social functions, slang has also adapted to synchronous Internet communication like chatrooms, which take advantage of the group-identifying effects of slang use.

The term *slang* has always eluded precise definition, largely because slang words and expressions are not distinguished by form from other

types of lexis (Eble, “Slang, Argot, and Ingroup Codes” 414). Slang serves the social functions of language, and the recurring characteristics associated with slang are the result of its social function (Eble, *Slang and Sociability* ch. 1).

- Slang is a component of spoken interaction and is seldom used in writing.
- Slang signals informality and often irreverence or defiance.
- Slang is the distinctive vocabulary of groups: the use of the same slang enhances group identity and separates insiders from outsiders.
- Slang meanings are often derived entirely from situational context and can be ironic.
- The slang a group uses changes quickly.

Slang is rooted in social connections. The power to evoke feelings of being connected to other – of belonging to a group, of being accepted, and of being socially secure – distinguishes slang from other sorts of informal vocabulary. People who use the same slang feel connected to each other and disconnected from those who do not. *Dank* and *swell*, for example, are denotatively comparable. Both mean ‘good’ in the sentences “That concert was *dank*” and “That concert was *swell*.” The choice of *dank* rather than *swell*, or vice-versa, gives no distinguishing information about the concert, but it does give distinguishing information about the speakers. It reveals the different groups that the speakers identify with and feel connected to.

Slang is associated with groups. Knowing and keeping up with constantly changing in-group vocabulary is often an unstated requirement of group membership, and inability to master the slang can result in discomfort or estrangement. The group-identifying functions of slang are not disputable, perhaps because they are so obvious and have been experienced by nearly everyone. Speakers use slang when they want to be creative, clear, and acceptable to a select group. In addition, a group’s slang often provides users with automatic linguistic responses that assign others to either an in crowd or an out crowd. For example, during school year 2006-2007 undergraduate students at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill¹ had at least 26 nouns to label someone negatively and 34 words and phrases to name or characterize a positive experience. See Table 1.

¹ For a description of the way in which I have collected student slang at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the limitations of the corpus, see Eble, *Slang and Sociability*, 4-6.

TABLE 1
2006-2007 University of North Carolina Student Slang
Evaluative Terms

Negative: *asshole, bama, bizmarkie, d-bag, douche, douchebag, douchebat, douche cannon, fag, fucker, hater, heffa, hoodrat, jackass, jerk, lawyer, loser, mark, player, shithead, sketchball, tool, toolbag, toolbox, trailer park trash, and winner*

Positive: *baller, banging, beast, bitching, the bomb, boston, bumping, choice, clean, cool, crazy, dank, dope, fetch, fly, hot, hotsauce, ill, killer, like steak, money, nasty, phat, popping, rad, rocking, sexy, the shits, sick, sweet, the ticket, tight, wicked, win.*

It has been well documented in English-speaking contexts since the eighteenth century that particular kinds of groups are breeding grounds for an idiosyncratic vocabulary to enhance their solidarity. Groups that operate on the periphery of society—prisoners, thieves, drug dealers, con-artists, gamblers, musicians and nightclub performers, carnival workers, and enlisted personnel in the military, to name a few – seem particularly adept at creating slang. Some slang-producing groups engage in activities that are disreputable or illegal. Others, like low-ranking military personnel, feel isolated from mainstream society because they lack freedom and ordinary access to the channels of power. Most groups whose colorful slang has been reported in numerous popular publications for more than two centuries lead lives in which the printed word, mastery of the standard written forms of language, and formal education are not important. By contrast, the oral language of these groups is often rich, complex, and powerful, and they live by using it effectively (Eble, “Slang and Antilanguage” 265-66).

Robert Chapman calls the specialized social vocabulary of subcultures primary slang (xii). The primary slang of groups is often appropriated into general slang. It strikes members of the mainstream who adopt it as novel, rich, and imaginative. It suggests a way of life with greater fun and excitement than the well-regulated lives of most. Adopting the vocabulary is a way of sharing vicariously in the daring while remaining apart from what is unsafe or objectionable about the way of life in the subculture. The argot of the racetrack, for instance, is responsible for a number of words that now apply more generally than to horse racing: a *piker* is an ‘unimportant or inconsequential participant,’ a *ringer* an ‘illegal substitution,’ and a *shoo-in*

an 'easy win.' Current American English is filled with vocabulary of varying degrees of formality that originated in the slang of groups: *asap* 'as soon as possible,' *chew out* 'reprimand severely,' and *midnight requisition* 'thievery' from the military; *cool* 'excellent' and *square* 'dull, conventional' from jazz musicians; *dark horse* 'unlikely winner' from racetrack gamblers; and *blow someone's mind* 'dazzle, amaze, shock' and *cold turkey* 'total and abrupt deprivation' from narcotics addicts. At the end of the twentieth century, the primary slang of young African-Americans in urban ghettos was propelled throughout the world by the commercial success of rap music.

Secondary slang, on the other hand, functions for purposes of a breezy, trendy, or avant-garde style or attitude more than for identification with an easily delineated group. Examples of current American English secondary slang are *nuke* 'heat in a microwave oven,' and *pump up* 'fill with enthusiasm or energy.'

Secondary slang often indicates knowledge of contemporary currents in popular and widespread culture rather than affiliation with a particular group. If expressions like *channel surf* 'use a remote control device to sample television programs quickly,' *chick flick* 'film that appeals to females,' *go postal* 'lose control, act insane,' and *senior moment* 'temporary loss of thought or memory' can be considered slang at all, they are a kind of national slang and say nothing about group identification. Chapman predicts that in the future secondary slang will be the major type of slang in the United States (xii).

Words and expressions that become part of secondary slang may well be acquired from groups, but usually via television, films, music, and the like rather than through personal interaction with members of the group. For example, the terms *high five* and *raise the roof* and their accompanying gestures serve as 'signs of affirmation, exhilaration, or victory' to all ages and classes throughout the United States. They were made popular by African-American sports figures and performers. Another item of secondary slang from African-American sources that was spread by the mass media is *attitude* 'uncooperative, resentful, hostile, or condescending state of mind.'

The group that has had the greatest impact on American slang in general has been African Americans. According to Robert Chapman's preface to the *New Dictionary of American Slang*, "Close analysis would probably show that, what with the prominence of black people in the armed forces,

in music, in the entertainment world, and in street and ghetto life, the black influence on American slang has been more pervasive in recent times than that of any other ethnic group in history” (xi). Many expressions of African-American origin have been adopted into general informal use, and their users may even be unaware of their African-American origins, for example, *bug* ‘pester,’ *the nitty-gritty* ‘harsh reality,’ *ripoff* ‘theft,’ and *do one’s own thing* ‘follow one’s own inclination.’

A study of college slang at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill across two decades, 1972-1993, showed that seven of the forty most frequently submitted terms entered the student vocabulary from African-American usage: *jam* ‘have a good time, perform well,’ *diss* ‘criticize, belittle,’ *bad* ‘good,’ *homeboy/homey* ‘person from one’s hometown, friend,’ *dude* ‘male,’ *word/word up* ‘I agree,’ and *fox/foxy* ‘attractive female, attractive’ (Eble, *Slang and Sociability* 84).

Another often-noticed characteristic of slang is its informality. In the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, Jonathan Lighter traces the escalation of informality in America to the tremendous explosion in mass communication that took place around the beginning of the twentieth century. Improved technology allowed the print media for the first time to reach a national and multi-class audience. Between the Civil War of the 1860s and World War I, the number of daily newspapers in the United States increased over ten times, many carrying the new vernacular art form of the 1890s, the comic strip (1: xxvi-xxvii). Soon phonograph records, movies, radio, and television quickly expanded the means of disseminating a national popular culture, making the national spread of slang and other ephemeral vocabulary possible. By the 1990s the alliance of technology and marketing made the fashionable vocabulary of the United States a sign of being in-the-know throughout the world.

American slang today shows both continuity with the past and elements of fresh appeal required by fashion. Aside from the primary slang of counter-cultural groups in which age is often not a factor, slang is associated with youth or with an effort to project a youthful image. Adolescents and young adults do not attempt to be *cool* by imitating the behavior, styles, or vocabulary of the middle-aged and elderly. The direction of imitation is the opposite. Although older people may be the models and arbiters of standard language use, young people are the purveyors of slang. In the twentieth

century in the United States, mass communication made a national youth culture possible. Over the decades, the two most important and consistent elements of youth culture have been borrowings from non-mainstream subcultures and music. When advances in technology made the transmission of music easier, quicker, and less expensive, music became a defining, and often defiant, characteristic of subcultures. Today rap music is the primarily vehicle of the international youth culture spreading across the planet.

The vocabulary of rap that originated in African-American urban experience and was hungrily seized by devotees of rap music expanded its sphere of influence – as had happened earlier with vocabulary from jazz and jive. In the 1980s and 1990s, at the same time that hip-hop insiders espoused competing stylistic developments inside rap music and held strong convictions about the political and social messages the music conveyed, an outmoded and stereotypic portion of the insider vocabulary of hip-hop was reaching an extensive and largely politically uninvolved audience by means of MTV (Music Television), cable television programming, and sit-coms and talk shows on the major networks. It would have been difficult for anyone in the United States in the 1990s to have escaped hearing expressions like *dead presidents* ‘money,’ *def* ‘good,’ *diss* ‘criticize,’ *hood* ‘neighborhood,’ *wanna-be* ‘phony,’ and scores more. By 1998 many Americans who had never willingly listened to rap music were talking about the newly designed paper money issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury and calling it *benjamins* ‘money, a hundred dollar bill’ – without realizing that the trendy new expression had come directly from rap lyrics.

The advent of the Internet changed social communication, the ordinary context of slang. David Crystal, in *Language and the Internet*, which was published in 2001 and required a second edition by 2006, says, “The Internet is an electronic, global, and interactive medium, and each of these properties has consequences for the kind of language found there” (26). No longer is face-to-face interaction a requisite for connectivity. Via the Internet, people use language to communicate within seconds across oceans and across political boundaries. Two of the standard major characteristics of slang – its restriction to oral communication and its role in the maintenance of groups – would appear threatened by Internet communication – which is mainly written and has no group boundaries.

Written language rather than spoken language is the norm of Internet communication – though now with the ability to send video clips, transmission

of language via the Internet may soon not depend on the written word. Most linguistic studies of Internet communication to this point have focused on the relationship between oral and written linguistic interaction, research which Crystal summarizes well in his 2006 book (28-30, 45, 47).

The notion of *group*, which has always been the primary generator of slang, must now include networks, often of connected strangers, who do not form a set on the traditional bases of kinship, location, or face-to-face acquaintance.

Despite the change from oral to written medium and the change in what *group* means, slang is thriving in Internet communication, particularly American slang. Anyone on the planet with an Internet connection has access to it.

The easiest place to find slang nowadays is the World Wide Web. In 2002 I looked at slang lexicography on the web by classifying and describing the dictionary components of a sample of 70 sites (“Slang Lexicography,” “The Expanding World”). My search for the word *slang* using google.com on July 24, 2002, yielded 873 entries. (The same search on May 28, 2007 yielded 21,700,000 hits.) In 2002, I looked at roughly ten percent of the sites (i.e., ninety) by selecting every ninth page of the display, from p. 9 through p. 81. Of these ninety entries, 20 were either inaccessible or had nothing to do with the meaning of *slang* in the study of language. Thus my impressions are based on a corpus of seventy Internet sites that pertained in some way to the type of vocabulary called *slang*.

Thirty-three, almost half, had language as their main focus – this number may be a bit high because it includes, for instance, grammar handbook pages and a site for copy editors. The other half of the sites incorporated slang within a wider topic; i.e., the purpose of the site was not mainly to give a list of slang but to include slang as it pertains to a particular interest group. For example, one site displayed and sold reminders of home to expatriate South Africans and included a glossary of slang.

Another major division was based on the purpose of the site – whether or not the primary aim was to sell goods or services. Slightly more than one-third, 29, seemed to be commercial in intent, although sometimes it was hard to tell. An interesting one is www.peakenglish.com. In 2002 and 2003 PEAK English displayed a trademark symbol on its home page and called itself the “online, interactive English school for the ESL/EFL

community.” PEAK English used slang as a tantalizer. The word-of-the-day in July 2002 was *blimp* for ‘fat person.’ The entry provided a definition and a citation as well as a cartoon-like graphic. Ten months later, the “slang of the day” was *low-life*, explained by a cartoon, a sound-byte pronunciation, a definition, two sample sentences, and two synonyms. Additional features were a Slang Forum, a Slang Dictionary, and Slang [Greeting] Cards that a subscriber could send to friends by email. By May 2007 PEAK English had become part of Distant Learning, Inc., and required registration to get further than the home page. The use of slang might well have contributed to the site’s success in luring paying customers.

Among the five most frequent topics of my 70 sample sites was ESL/EFL. In my google searches of September 2006 and May 2007 among the top hits was www.slangcity.com, a site for non-native speakers. The upper left of the homepage displayed a photograph of laughing Asian girls. The opening page had warnings that the site contained “bad language,” and the screen was filled with many opportunities in tiny print. The section “New Song Translations” gave English lyrics containing slang along with a translation in standard English. There were also “New Movie Translations.” The site www.slangcity.com came up again in my google search for *slang* on May 28, 2007, this time as #8: “Yeah, baby! It’s the online home of American slang!” Still on a mission to disclose “bad words,” the site allows visitors to click the cursor on a body part in a work of art and to get the standard English word and a display of synonyms of five degrees of badness. For example, for standard English *penis*, the least bad degree, for “Kids,” lists *wee-wee*. “Super Polite” is *thing*. “Okay” are *Johnson, dick, weiner, weenie, sausage*, and *little + name of person*. “A little bad” are *dong, schlong, pecker, tool*, and *shaft*. “Bad” are *cock* and *prick*.

For 90% of the sites in my 2002 sample, the language was English. The two Japanese sites were actually bilingual – one was Japanese “slangs” for interpreters, and the other was lesson four of a commercial site for learning Japanese. The Spanish and Russian sites seemed to be commercial ones selling “coolness.” The sites in Polish and Hungarian were lexicons of professional quality posted by established scholars. The list of Tagalog slang is a small part of an impressive educational site on Filipino cultural and linguistic resources housed at Northern Illinois University.

What do these forays onto the web in search of slang suggest? The largest portion of Internet locations identified by a google.com search for

slang consists of lists of words and phrases and their meanings – that is lexicons – with little discussion of what the existence of such a lexicon implies. Though most slang lists on the Internet do not make the distinctions among sub-types of vocabulary that linguists might call *jargon*, *regionalisms*, *slang*, and *colloquialisms*, the people who established these sites understand that an ordinary way of marking some portions of human experience as special is by creating a special shared vocabulary for it. The social essence of slang vocabulary is at least intuitively understood by the authors of and contributors to these websites. The sites support a distinction between the primary slang of groups and the secondary slang that identifies users with a style or trend. Instead of serving to exclude people from group membership, which is often a characteristic of primary slang, many sites are inclusive and welcoming. Anyone who is interested may participate. Commonly, sites invite contributions of vocabulary, and some even identify the contributor of an item. None of the sites asks for evidence that a submission is authentic usage rather than a coinage by the contributor. The site www.pseudodictionary.com even proclaims itself as “the place where words you’ve made up can become part of an online dictionary!” The notion that slang admits new words is implicit in many other sites too. So is the notion that language choices have social consequence – as shown by warnings about objectionable language on some sites.

The World Wide Web has brought the collection of words into a new era for both professional and amateur dictionary makers. Publishers like Merriam-Webster and Random House maintain free, attractively designed, and user-friendly websites about words, many of which are slang. However, more sites are maintained by individuals. Sometimes success with an individual’s website comes with a price though. *The Totally Unofficial Rap Dictionary*, which used to reside amidst a colorful, high tech display of the latest information about rap, rappers, and how to buy favorite CDs, folded into Wikipedia and now seems like part of the establishment. Webpages devoted to slang are as ephemeral as slang itself, with new ones being born and others falling into neglect every day.

Although websites are the most accessible Internet sources for repositories of slang (and the only Internet application that I have studied), more interesting to language change are the uses of slang words and phrases in various types of Internet communication—like email, chatrooms, instant messaging, and games. Although much has been published on the

language of email and chatrooms, the use of slang in these linguistic exchanges is barely mentioned in the research. (The index to Crystal's 276-page book points to brief mentions of the term *slang* on only five pages.)

Chatrooms and Internet social networks ought to be a natural venue for slang because they are anchored in group formation. They are one means of forming a social group – an “in-crowd” – out of people who cannot be or who are not in the same location. Crystal explains, “Maintaining the identity of the group is the important thing, especially as there is no other sort of identity to rely upon, given that personal anonymity is the norm” (172). Furthermore, Crystal observes that slang is a means of creating group identity, saying “Although the use of non-standard formations, jargon, and slang varies from group to group, all synchronous chatgroups rely heavily upon such processes, presumably as a mechanism of affirming group identity” (171).

Crystal's description of the relationship among participants in a chatroom (171-76) could just as readily fit American college students interacting face-to-face and using slang. In his discussion of chatrooms, Crystal says,

even in the most contentless and incoherent interactions of the synchronous setting, the social advantages outweigh the semantic disadvantages. The atmosphere, even when a topic is in sharp focus, is predominantly recreational (as the common metaphor of ‘surfing’ suggests). Language play is routine. Participants frequently provide each other with expressions of rapport. Subjectivity rules: personal opinions and attitudes, often of an extreme kind, dominate, making it virtually impossible to maintain a calm level of discourse for very long. If you are looking for facts, the chatgroup is not the place to find them. But if you are looking for opinions to react to, or want to get one of your own off your chest, it is the ideal place. Trivial remarks, often of a strongly phatic character, permeate interactions. ‘Gossip-groups’ would be a more accurate description for most of what goes on in a chatgroup situation. And gossip, as in the real world, is of immense social value. (174-75)

The use of slang in chatgroups (and other kinds of synchronous Internet interactions) will depend at least in part on how readily the effects of slang match the aims of chatgroups. Table 2 lists the slang terms most frequently submitted by my students at the University of North Carolina

from April 2006 through April 2007. A cursory examination shows that, like the conversations within chatgroups, student slang is “contentless” and “recreational” and provides “expressions of rapport.” It pertains overwhelmingly to social life and to who and what are admissible to the group.

TABLE 2
Slang Items Most Frequently Submitted by University of North Carolina Students
Spring Semester 2006-Spring Semester 2007
In Order of Frequency

SKETCHY/SKETCH	— suggestive of danger, causing suspicion
FACEBOOK	— look someone up on www.facebook.com
SOROSTITUTE	— young woman who behaves in a sexually seductive manner
WORD	— affirmation of agreement or encouragement
PEACE OUT/PEACE	— goodbye
HOLLER/HOLLA	— be in communication with another; goodbye
SWEET	— excellent, admirable, enviable
DANK	— of superior quality, excellent
CHILL OUT/CHILL	— relax, do nothing of consequence
HOT	— extremely attractive
BUTTERFACE	— female with an attractive body but an ugly face (< but her face)
FRATASTIC	— highly favorable by the standards of fraternity life
HELLA	— extremely
OWN/PWN	— dominate another person or prevail in a challenging situation
BALLER/BALLA	— someone with admirable athletic or social skills
BEAST	— dominate another person or prevail in a challenging situation
CRUCIAL	— excellent, admirable
CRUNK	— crazy acting and drunk
DIME	— beautiful female, a #10
DOUCHEBAG/DOUCHE	— disagreeable or unlikable person
HOOKUP	— partner in any kind of sexual activity
WHAT’S GOOD?	— greeting
SHORTY/SHAWTY	— girlfriend
BADONKADONK	— buttocks
DOPE	— of superior quality
GRUB	— food
WHACK	— weird, strange, unusual
WHIP	— car

Most items in Table 2 are evaluative terms, labels to pigeonhole someone or something as acceptable or unacceptable. The most frequently submitted term by far was SKETCH/SKETCHY, meaning ‘suggestive of

danger'. It can apply to a person, as in "I don't like to go to Josh's apartment —his roommate is sketch." Or it can apply to a situation, as in, "That parking lot looks sketch. Let's take a different route back to the house." DANK, HOT, BALLER, CRUCIAL, DOPE, and SWEET are positive assessments. WHACK means 'weird, strange' and can apply to people and things. A DOUCHEBAG is a 'socially inept person,' definitely not favored by the group. The terms FRATASTIC (<fraternity + fantastic) and SOROSTITUTE (<sorority + prostitute) allude to the social organizations for men and for women on American college campuses. HELLA is an intensifier for both adjectives and adverbs. To OWN and to BEAST mean 'to dominate.' Three items refer to females: DIME is a 'beautiful female' (a #10); a BUTTERFACE is a 'woman with a beautiful body but an ugly face'; and a SHORTY is a 'girlfriend'. BADONKADONK is 'buttocks,' particularly large and rounded and belonging to a female. GRUB is 'food' or 'to eat'. CRUNK blends *crazy* + *drunk*. CHILL/CHILL OUT means 'to take it easy', and CHILLAX is a blend of CHILL + *relax*. HOOK UP is 'to find a partner for romance or sex'. WHIP is 'a car'. WORD is a sign of agreement or acceptance. Others are part of the systems of greetings and farewells: WHAT'S GOOD?, PEACE OUT, and HOLLA.

Two are influenced by the Internet. PWN alludes to a mistyping of OWN. Now students deliberately type it PWN and even pronounce it /pon/ rather than /on/: "He poned me in basketball." FACEBOOK means 'to look someone up on the Internet social network www.facebook.com. It is accompanied by FRIEND, 'to list someone as a friend on facebook' and DEFRIEND, 'to remove someone from one's list of friends on facebook.'

The slang vocabulary of students is clearly amenable to chatrooms, though with some strictures that do not apply on campus. In chatrooms, language choice is the sole means available for gaining entry to the group and finding a place there. Unlike in face-to-face interactions, body language, appearance, and clues from the setting are not available. Neither is intonation to show enthusiasm on the one hand or sarcasm on the other. Getting slang right is even more important and precarious in chatrooms than in face-to-face conversation.

The remarkable and instantaneous success of Internet social networks attests to young people's desire to identify with a group rather than with the anonymous world. On college campuses in the U.S. now, the most

prevalent is www.facebook.com. It is designed to allow users to be as exclusive or inclusive as they like, creating their own network of “friends.” Thus it appears that slang, the kind of vocabulary that has always served group identity, still has a place in the twenty-first century, when one’s group may have members in China, Brazil, and Egypt.

In sum, the rapid changes to its habitat over the past two decades have not made slang an endangered species. On the contrary, slang is even participating in the global economy. Sixty flashcards of American slang for the “nerdy, uncool, or simply suburban” eager to learn the latest slang are now retailing at www.knockknock.biz for \$14.95.

Slang as a type of lexis is thriving in the new media and social contexts created by the rapid changes in technology at the end of the twentieth century. Rather than mainly the group-identifying vocabulary of various marginalized and small groups, slang is now worldwide the vocabulary of choice of young people (who compose the majority of the inhabitants of the earth) and reflects their tastes in music, art, clothing, and leisure time pursuits. The study of the new breed of slang, however, lags behind. Foremost, it is not yet an integral part of sociolinguistics. The strongest type of extant slang scholarship, lexicography, is threatened by market conditions. Printed dictionaries of slang based mainly on written corpora – though still of long term value for historic purposes – are extremely time-consuming to produce and prohibitively expensive. For example, a well-established and reputable American publishing firm recently cancelled its reference division, including its unfinished slang dictionary. Lexicographers and sociolinguists now have the possibility of observing, collecting, and disseminating their analyses of current slang very quickly and in imaginative non-print formats. The study of slang is a wide open research opportunity for those convinced that slang vocabulary gives insight into human characteristics that are not trivial and who also can apply their imagination to twenty-first century technology.

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The Identity of “World English”

Kanavillil Rajagopalan
Universidade Estadual de Campinas

1. Languages and their identities

Strange as it might seem, languages have their own individual identities. At the very least, they are believed to possess distinct, inalienable identities. It is part of what we call “the politics of identity” to fix the identities of national languages and, with it, fix the identities of nations and peoples. Politics of language identity is part of language policy and language planning. Before the establishment of nation-states, no one really bothered about languages having fuzzy identities. In fact, most language identities were rather ‘wishy-washy’ until then. But all that changed overnight with the rise of nation-states and language policies were put in place all over Europe to make sure that national boundaries coincided with linguistic boundaries (or, as it would be more appropriate to say, the other way round!).

2. Globalization and its impact on language identities

But let us not forget that the goal of ‘One nation, one people, one language’ (an essentially European dream, transported over the years over to other continents) is currently coming under strain, thanks to the ongoing process of globalization. For one thing, national boundaries are crumbling fast to all intents and purposes and, in many cases, are still there simply to remind us of an order of things that no longer exists. Naturally, this is reflected in the identities of many languages. This is especially so in

the case of languages that have spread far and wide, to regions not historically associated with them. Foremost among these languages is English or – as our discussion will soon make it clear – whatever we are accustomed to calling English.

3. The transformation of English into “World English”

What exactly is one referring to when one speaks of the meteoric rise of the English language right across the world, especially in the years following the end of World War II? To many, the question may sound either jejune or tongue-in-cheek, depending on how you look at it. Didn't the two world wars decide once and for all who the winner was and who was going to call the shots from now on? Isn't it true that the supremacy over the world was definitively transferred to the Anglophone countries, notably the U.S.A. and the U.K.? In her book *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation*, Sue Wright even puts a date on the establishment of English as the world's number one language: 1919 (the year of the end of World War I). In her own words,

The Europeans' acceptance of the Wilsonian principle of self-determination is widely acknowledged as one domain in which the authority of the Americans was felt . . . It is less well known that Woodrow Wilson required that the Treaties of Versailles, Sèvres and Trianon be published in English as well as French. This, significantly was the first occasion when the use of French as the language of European treaties was challenged. This beginning of the end of the supremacy of French as the language of European diplomacy went hand in hand with France's loss of influence. (143)

But the triumphant march of English, according to Wright, was only just beginning.

At the end of the Second World War, English was the language of the victors and of military might. The two other European languages that had been recently used as lingua francas were in eclipse. In defeat, German lost its role as the language of science and technology. French had lost prestige through the Vichy government's capitulation and collaboration, and was ousted as the main war of postwar negotiations,

treaties and diplomacy. In contrast to 1918, when the English speakers had to lobby for their language to be used, the French had to press their case in 1945-46 for French to be included as one of the six official languages of the United Nations Organisation. (143-44)

4. The "ownership" of World English

Now, no one can dispute the fact that the fortunes of the English language were decisively sealed by the allied victories in the two world wars of the last century and, more specifically, by the pivotal role played by the United States of America in those wars.

But those who still entertain the belief that the English language is what it is today, thanks to the rise of the United States in the wake of the Second World War are missing the whole point about the role of what I call "World English" in our world in the era of globalization. One immediate implication of that widely held view is that the fate of English is tied to the prestige of the U.S. and, at a more tangible level, to the strength of the U. S. dollar. In her book *World English: A Study of its Development*, Janina Brutt-Griffler identifies what leads us to conclude that this is how things turn out to be. In her own words,

In the phrase "English spread," it is only natural to take *spread* as a verb – and a transitive one: the British (and Americans) *spread* English. Indeed, a central contention of the theory of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) is that English spread in the postcolonial world represents the cultural hegemony of the most powerful English-speaking nations. English is therefore an imposed language in the periphery. An important implication follows from this notion: World English is the product of the "mother-tongue" English language nations, particularly the U.K. and the U.S.A. (107)

In other words, there are those among us who argue that the future of English is dependent on the likelihood or otherwise of the U.S. continuing to play its hegemonic role in world affairs. Since that possibility seems uncertain to many, especially in view of the much-talked-of ascendancy of emergent economies, many are of the opinion that English will soon lose much of its current glitter and cease to be what it is today, namely a

world language. And there are those amongst us who further speculate that, in fifty or a hundred years' time, we will all have acquired fluency in, say, Mandarin, or, if we haven't, will be longing to learn it.

5. The old order changeth ...

In my previously published work (Rajagopalan, "Linguistics," "Review of 'The English'," "Review of 'Resisting'," "The Politics," "The Concept," "Language Politics," "South American," "Revisiting"), I have been insisting that such dooms-day talk is purely alarmist and sensational and is based on a number of incorrect impressions of actual facts on the ground. For one, the English language that we say can truly be regarded as the language of communication across the world has little to do with the language of England where it is believed to have sprung up somewhere around the year 450 C.E. (King 21). It is "World English," a completely different ball-game. It is fairly easy to see why it is so. Consider the following argument: a language such as English can only be claimed to have attained an *international* status to the very extent it has ceased to be *national*, i.e., the exclusive property of this or that nation in particular (Widdowson). In other words, the U.K. or the U.S.A. or whosoever cannot have it both ways. If they do concede that English is today a world language, then it only behooves them to also recognize that it is not their exclusive property, as painful as this might indeed turn out to be. In other words, it is part of the price they have to pay for seeing their language elevated to the status of a world language. Now, the key word here is "elevated". It is precisely in the process of getting elevated to a world status that English or what I insist on referring to as the "World English" goes through a process of metamorphosis.

Wimal Dissanayake puts it eloquently when he writes:

Whether we examine the fictional writings of older novelists like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutola, G.V. Desami and Albert Wendt, or relatively younger writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Taroor, Arundhati Roy, M.G. VasANJI, Mongane Serote and Cathernine Lim, the complex relationship between self, narrative, and language becomes evident. These writers are seeking to gain entrance to their

multifaceted subjectivities by "decolonizing" the English language and the sedimented consciousness that goes with it. (558-59)

6. World English: a completely different ball game

Whereas, as we have just seen, the argument for conceding that the English language that is circulating in the world today is a far cry from its 'namesake' that is closely associated with countries of the so-called "inner circle" (Kachru, "Standards") may seem straightforward and hardly in need of any further supporting arguments to back it up, the message does not appear to have 'sunk in' amongst the members of the scholarly community to the extent one would wish it had. And scholars who have taken up the challenge of theorizing the role of English in the current scenario have often assumed positions that contribute to the formation of a distorted image of what is happening. In what follows I shall take a close look at some of these stances.

In his book *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality*, Davies dismisses the whole idea of World English and says that when one speaks of "English as an international language," one has actually in mind either British or American variety of English as it is currently being used speakers other than those belonging to either of these countries. Here is what he has to say in this respect:

The question is . . . whether International English means a special variety of English with its own norms which are distinct from any national official Standard English, or whether it means a use of English in a number of international conferences, settings, for example the United Nations, academic conferences, trade missions, business negotiations. My own view is that International English usually means using one or the other Standard English in international settings. (214-215)

Just how out of step with the times Davies's position is can be judged from the fact anywhere between two thirds and three fourths of those who regularly use English across the world fall under into the category of 'non-natives speakers,' i.e., people who belong to countries

where English is either a second language – Kachru’s “outer circle” countries – or a foreign language – Kachru’s “expanding circle” (Kachru, “Standards”). And it is totally unrealistic to expect that the English they speak will continue to obey the norms established for the so-called Standard English (Rajagopalan, “Revisiting”).

The idea of English as an International Language (EIL) has also been addressed by Jennifer Jenkins in her recent book *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. But her view of EFL (English as a Lingua Franca) is in large measure opposed to that of Davies and similar ones which she brands as representative of the “standard language ideology.” However, in her earlier book *The Phonology of English as an International Language* she is widely perceived as having espoused a view for which she has been severely criticized on the grounds that it is centered around the figure of the native speaker – an accusation vehemently denied by her in her recent work. The problem with the idea of a minimum of intelligibility for all that she pleads for is that it inevitably brings in the idea of a nucleus, because it immediately raises the question of “intelligibility for whom?” (Rajagopalan, “Review of English”). Surely, the expected answer can only be (or, so it would seem) that it is someone who is considered to be the speaker most entitled to such a privileged position – another description of a native speaker.

Another term that has gained some currency is “Global English.” Like the term “English an International Language / a Lingua Franca,” this too is open to conflicting interpretations. What exactly are we referring to here? Is it the good old English language as it has gone global or is it a new language in the making? In his book *English as a Global Language*, Crystal is celebratory about the rise of English to a global status. He does admit that, under the umbrella of English, a whole “family” of languages may be emerging. But what makes them members of the same family is that they all have sprung from one and the same source – namely, the tongue originally spoken in England. In other words, despite his condescending attitude towards the new varieties of English, Crystal seems to be of the opinion that what guarantees their unity is their common origin. In a scathing review article, Phillipson (“Voice in global English”) picked on this latent triumphalism apparent in Crystal’s stance.

Diametrically opposed to Crystal’s triumphalism is David Graddol’s view that, although English is most likely to be a force to reckon with for

the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that it will be a domineering force. Graddol also predicts that monolingual speakers of English are going to face more and more difficulty in finding jobs in a globally competitive job market where bi-(multi-)linguals have already started to outnumber them. Perhaps more interestingly, he also prophecies that, with the spread of English taking place at this impressive rate, the days of English as a *foreign* language may well be numbered. Now, this is an interesting idea in itself, because, if true, it will have serious implications for the whole business of English language teaching (more on this, at the end of this paper).

"World Englishes" is a term that has become fashionable, thanks mainly to the journal by that name and also due to the recent publication of *The Handbook of World Englishes* (Kachru et al.). Noteworthy here is the use of the plural "Englishes." Likewise, McArthur speaks of the "English languages." Once again, in the plural. On the face of it, this tactic is meant to draw attention to the argument that all the different varieties of English are on an equal footing as far their linguistic status is concerned. But there is a snag here. Implicitly, the different varieties of English are being compared to different dialects of a language. But we know that the different dialects of a given language do not all enjoy the same status, especially from a social or political perspective. Also, for many practical purposes such as foreign language teaching, one would think it reasonable to choose one specific dialect to the relative neglect of the others. If this is the case, then what other dialect would qualify for this purpose other than one that is deemed to be central rather than peripheral? So, the standard language ideology is sneaked in, only this time through the back door.

7. The case for "World English"

My principal reason for preferring the term "World English" in the singular is that, despite the inevitable "nativization" of the different "Englishes" and their consequent distancing from one another, the centripetal forces at work in our globalized world far outweigh the centrifugal ones. This argument alone should lay to rest the thesis that English will follow in the footsteps of Latin in the Middle Ages. A more likely scenario to emerge with the passage of time is the development of two distinct varieties of the language in each country, one for internal use and the other for

international communication. The rise of “Hinglish” – a mixture of English and Hindi – is illustrative of the trend. The interesting thing about this curious linguistic phenomenon is that those who regularly use it in their day-to-day lives are also capable of speaking a variety of English that is especially reserved for conversing with foreigners.

“World English” is conceptually a mind-boggler. It has no parallel in human history. Attempts to find parallels with languages such as Latin, Arabic, Sanskrit etc. run aground for the simple reason that there was no impetus in those times for interaction on a global scale. In other words, English, or rather “World English,” is in a class by itself. As of now, one can only make some wild guesses as to what might await us in the future. But one thing is for sure: we are dealing with a linguistic phenomenon (what else should one call something that has all the trappings of a language but has no native speakers?) that is still in the making. Furthermore, it has no center. Instead, it is polycentric (Blommaert).

8. The challenge ahead

It must be fairly obvious from the discussion in the foregoing paragraphs that the very concept of “world Englishes” throws a number of challenges at all those of us who are in one way or another involved in it. For ELT professionals all over the world, it means, among other things, having to take a fresh look at many of the things that have been taken for granted for long.

Consider, for instance, the following. World English is not the mother-tongue of *anyone* – and this includes even those who used to rejoice in their status as the “native-speakers” of their own varieties of English. This is so because world English is a language that is in the making and, from the looks of it is bound to remain so for the foreseeable future.

Incidentally, any temptation to consider World English a pidgin would be totally misguided in that it is not a make-shift language, nor one that is progressing towards a full-fledged language in its own right. Nor, for that matter, is it gathering a new generation of native speakers. Rather, it is resistant to the very terminology that the linguists resort to in describing conventional ‘natural’ languages.

This means that world English presents a set of hitherto unimaginable challenges to the descriptive linguist. But then modern linguistics itself, it has been argued, is the brain-child of the 19th century mindset (Hutton, Errington). As I have argued elsewhere (Rajagopalan, "Repensar o papel"), there is an urgent need to resuscitate it from its current moribund state and make it relevant to the emergent realities and challenges of the 21st century.

The biggest challenge to ELT professionals, I think, will be that of having to rethink our traditional ways of going about teaching it. Traditionally, the native speaker served as a kind of "loadstar" in English language teaching, something to be aimed at, though admittedly unattainable – whereof the whole idea of the "near-native" (Rajagopalan, "Non-native Speaker"). Well, that is all going to be a thing of the past. It is time to start thinking of setting up fresh goals for the ELT enterprise across the globe. In my forthcoming text "The English Language," I suggest that the countries of the Outer Circle may have a lesson or two to teach those of the Expanding Circle.

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Fractals and Fragmented Identities in Language Acquisition

Liliane Assis Sade

Universidade Federal de São João del-Rei

1. Introduction

The acknowledgement of the need to study the relation between identity and language acquisition is not something new. Many scholars have provided important insights into this field¹ and explored identity issues, such as national identity, racial discrimination, group identity, power relations and so on. Although the studies developed so far offer important contributions to the field of Applied Linguistics, they tend to focus on second language acquisition, especially, on immigrant experiences. Little has been said about the relation of identity and foreign language acquisition; we could wonder if experiences of students who learned the language without living in the country in which it is spoken were interwoven with matters of identity as well. Some could argue that in situations like these, identity issues would be minimized once the students were not exposed to cultural shock and to the need to reconstruct their social identity in face of language learning. However if we take the challenge and go deeper in the process, studying those students' histories, we can find out how identity matters are not only important but imperative if we are to

¹ See, for example, Schumann (1978), Andersen (1983), Norton (2000), Marx (2002), Rajagopalan (2003), Pavlenko and Lantolf (2004), Warschauer (2004), Golafshani (2004), Murphey et al. (2005) and Block (2005, 2006).

understand language acquisition in a complex way. Because of that, this paper takes as its first challenge to try to demonstrate the inter-relation between foreign language acquisition and identity issues through the study of students' narratives and to provide evidence that foreign language acquisition can affect and be affected by identity matters in a complex way in which one might reconstruct the other. To do that it borrows the corpus of narratives from the *AMFALE* project², developed at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), in Brazil.

When reflecting about this subject, one could ask if it is identity which influences language acquisition or if it is the latter which influences identity reconstruction. The answer to this question is not simple. As a matter of fact, it's very hard to be given if we establish this dichotomy, studying the two processes in a Cartesian perspective which places them in distinctive and contradictory poles. The complexity involved in this kind of study may call for a rupture with this Cartesian view, and demand the use of a new scientific paradigm. It's here where we place the second challenge of this study: to reflect upon identity and language acquisition borrowing the theoretical framework provided by Chaos Theory. In this perspective this paper seeks to show identity in the XXI century as a chaotic system which interacts with the social world in order to create the paradox of the individual who is unique and social at the same time and to prove that identity and language acquisition are in fact two sides of the same coin.

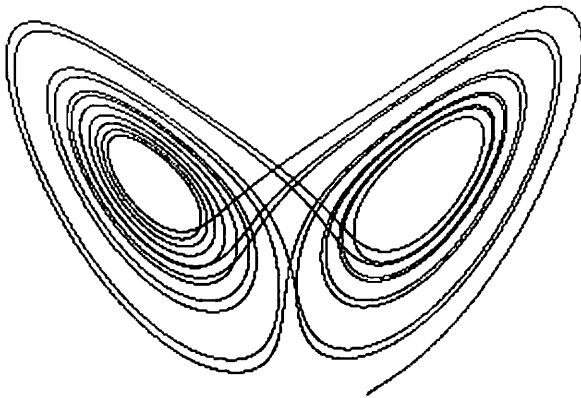
In the next section, a brief introduction to Chaos Theory will be provided to help the reader understand some of its basic concepts.

2. The Chaos theory

The word *chaos* is used to refer to behaviors which are apparently disordered and unpredictable, but have an underneath order. The study

² *AMFALE* stands for “*Aprendendo com Memórias de Falantes e Aprendizizes de Língua Estrangeira*” (*Learning with speakers and learners of foreign languages*). This project is developed at UFMG, in Brazil, and is coordinated by professor Vera Lúcia Menezes de O. e Paiva.

of chaos dates back to 1960s when a meteorologist named Edward Lorenz was making some weather simulations in his computer. He entered some data in the computer and ran the program to check which weather conditions those initial data would generate. When he decided to recreate a movement and entered the data again, he decided to round down the last decimal numbers. He was surprised to see that this small change caused a completely different behavior. It was proved that in chaotic systems small changes in initial conditions can cause huge effects. The sensibility to initial conditions means that two extremely close conditions may generate totally independent things (Stewart 125). The metaphor of the “butterfly effect” has been widely used to explain this principle of chaos theory: a simple movement of the wings of a small butterfly in one part of the word can generate a hurricane in another part of it. The metaphor of the butterfly came to be used due to the graphic representation (which resembles a butterfly) of this chaotic behavior developed by Lorenz, and which he called “Lorenz attractor” (picture 1).



PICTURE 1 - Lorenz attractor.

Because of this characteristic of chaotic systems, another principle emerges: there is not a single cause to explain a specific effect. It's because of the interaction of different aspects and conditions that one specific pattern emerges and we cannot understand this pattern if we study a single movement isolated from the others.

Now that the reader has some idea about Chaos theory, the next section will be dedicated to present some other concepts of it and relate

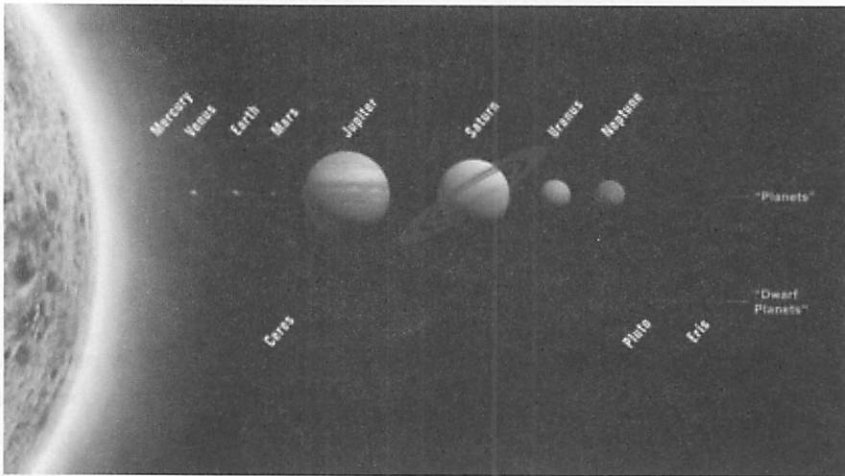
them to identity issues in an effort to show identity in the post-modern era as a chaotic system.

3. Chaos and identity

In this section, the concepts of attractor, bifurcation point, strange attractor and fractal will be presented and related to the works of Bakhtin, Giddens and Hall to discuss some issues about identity.

3.1 Attractor

Stewart explains that “the essence of an attractor is a portion in phase space in which any point in movement around it approaches more and more to it” (121). In stable structured systems – typical and predictable ones – the attractors are single points and stable cycles, and the only possible movements are to keep stable in one point or to repeat periodically some series of movement. An example of an attractor is the planet orbit (picture 2) – it is a pattern of movement that repeats itself and “attracts” any object, as a satellite for example, which is put in its orbit.



PICTURE 2 - attractor: planet orbit.

3.1.1 Attractor and identity

Once the concept of attractor has already been cleared, what is the analogy we can make to identity issues?

Bakhtin (“The Dialogic Imagination” 270-72) states that two forces act in discourse: centripetal and centrifugal. The author explains the first one saying that the unitary language of a specific society acts as a centripetal force once it contributes to guarantee mutual understanding; it’s necessary to overcome the heteroglossia and moves toward unity.

When Bakhtin comments on language, he makes it clear that nobody creates language for the first time – “we are not the ones who disturb the eternal silence of the universe” (“Estética da criação verbal” 270-85); we communicate using genres that precede us and act as a vehicle to transmit and naturalize ideologies. Once the genres of a specific society have a historical character, they bring rules that constrain behavior. It is imperative to explain here that genres in this sociohistorical perspective not only constrain linguistic behavior but also and mainly constrain human acceptable behavior in a given society. The values naturalized via discourse and stated in the use of genres determine the appropriateness of language and human behavior in different social contexts and institutions.

These arguments are also stated by Hymes when the author suggests that “a person who is a member of a speech community not only knows the language, but also what to say” (123). The inference we can make through this statement is that the members of a speech community not only share the same “language,” but also “the social norms” underneath this language.

It is clear that in any society there are centripetal forces that, just like the attractor, “attract” the people to some specific and appropriate behavior which is prescribed by language use. Any person who is born or lives in such society (making the analogy with attractors – any point which is put in the area) is caught in the movement pattern, or behavior pattern, of that such society.

To exemplify this point and relate it to language acquisition, let’s take a look at some extracts from the narratives in *AMFALE* project:

Extract 1:

My good performance in my English classes led my father to make the sacrifice of enrolling me at Cultura Inglesa. My self-esteem had increased, once a placement test had allowed me to enter, straight forward, in the third period of the basic course. I was in the last year of "ginasial" and my dream was to be a doctor. I decided to make vocational test to try to convince my father that I needed to attend "curso científico" to have better conditions to succeed in "vestibular". The tests indicated vocation to teaching. Frustrated I hid the results and insisted with my father that I didn't want to take the teaching course, but I didn't succeed. I was obliged to take "Curso Normal".

Extract 2:

In 1974, my English teacher gave me and my sister a scholarship to study English at his English school. I didn't want to study English. To tell you the truth, I hated English. I wanted to attend "Belas Artes". My father, then, talked to me and told me it would be important to study English, once it would help me with "vestibular". This way, I went to such school not very happily.

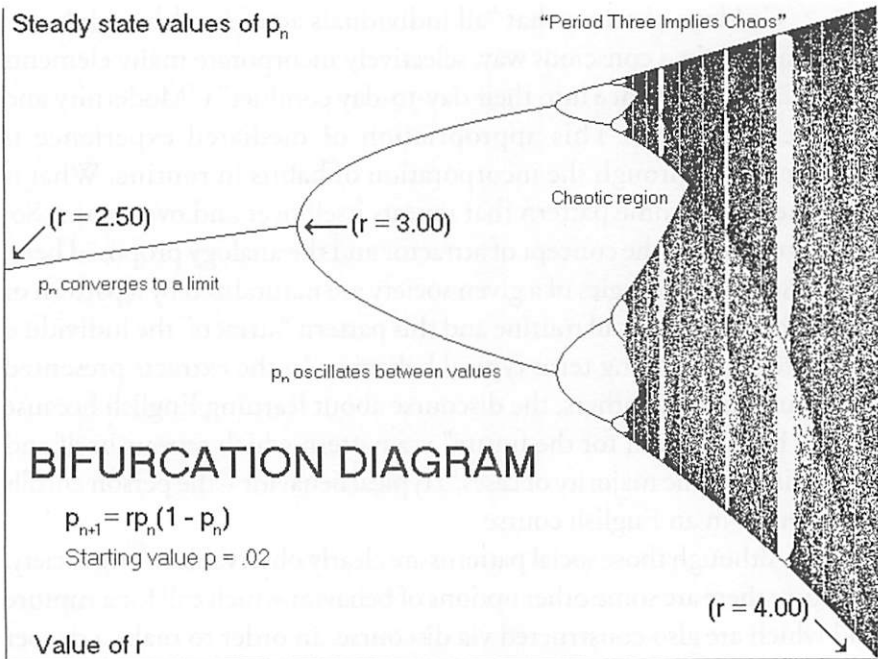
In both extracts, the individuals wanted to follow different paths; however, societal values, naturalized via discourse, constrained their behavior according to the rules prescribed for that society. In extract 1, the girl wanted to be a doctor at a time in which this job was to be performed by men. The "good girls," who belonged to the "good families," should attend a teacher's course, called "Curso Normal" in Brazil, to become teachers and afterwards get married and raise children. Although this specific girl didn't want to follow this track, she had to agree with it because of the social prescriptions. Those prescriptions affected the course of her life, determining her present identity. In a similar way, in extract 2, the boy wanted to study Arts, which was not "a man's subject," and he was kind of "obliged" to change his option and become something else. In both examples, the people involved became English teachers, although this was not their aim when they had to make their choices. In fact, they didn't have those choices. Also in both examples, the presence of parental discourse is very strong, thus showing the influence of the institution "family" in creating the identity of its members. Those identities reflect the social roles prescribed by the genres used in that society.

Giddens observes that “all individuals actively, although by no means always in a conscious way, selectively incorporate many elements of mediated experience into their day-to-day conduct” (“Modernity and self-identity” 416). This appropriation of mediated experience is accomplished through the incorporation of habits in routine. What is “routine” if not some pattern that repeats itself over and over again? So, taking once more the concept of attractor and the analogy proposed here, the values and ideologies of a given society are naturalized by a pattern of repetition which we call routine and this pattern “attracts” the individual and determines a long term typical behavior. In the extracts presented above and in many others, the discourse about learning English because “it will be important for the future” is a pattern which repeats itself and determines, in the majority of cases, a typical behavior – the person enrolls him/herself in an English course.

Although those social patterns are clearly observable in any society, of course there are some other options of behavior which call for a rupture and which are also constructed via discourse. In order to make a deeper examination of this statement, let’s present a new concept of Chaos Theory – “bifurcation points”.

3.2 Bifurcation points

There are some bifurcation points which cause a change in the route of an attractor. Each bifurcation point is a decision point. The system may pass by it and keep its regular route or it may change its movement pattern (picture 3).



PICTURE 3 - Bifurcation diagram.

In picture 3, we can see that there is a bifurcation in the trajectory of the system. The system suffers a rupture in some points and bifurcates in two. Each of these two may suffer new bifurcations and duplicate and so on. This movement will continue indefinitely. It's important to notice, however, that the system may pass by those points and keep its normal route or it may bifurcate. What causes the bifurcation or not is what is called "critical state."

The critical state may be caused by some external disturbances, such as, for example, a small change in the context; or it may develop from the system itself what is called self-organized criticality. Gleria et al explain that the self-organized criticality seems to emerge when the parts of a system start to move away from the equilibrium point (103). In critical states, there are no specific causes to great events. Small forces may have huge effects.

3.2.1 Bifurcation points and identity

As stated before, some social forces constrain social action and cause a typical appropriate behavior in a given society. However, there are some points in life in which different discourses can cause a rupture and establish a new pattern of behavior. It doesn't mean, however, that every individual will react the same way to the same discourses. To some, new discourses will merely not be considered and they will follow their pattern of behavior in the typical way they had done so far. Therefore, for others, those same discourses may be appealing and cause the emergence of a new identity. Giddens explains those bifurcation points, although the author treats them as "risky moments:"

To take care of our own lives involves risk, once it means to face the diversity of possibilities opened to us. The individual must be prepared to make an almost complete rupture to the past, if it is necessary, and must consider new courses of action which cannot be guided only by the established habits. The security reached by strict obedience to the established patterns is ephemeral, and at a certain point it will break. ("Modernidade e identidade" 72)

As has been argued here, those risky moments can cause a rupture with the established habits and generate new possible behaviors, and I would add here new possible selves. The extracts 3 and 4 presented below illustrate how the access to new discourses contributed to some bifurcation points and to the construction of new identities, in this specific case, the identities of language students and English teachers.

Extract 3:

But a really strong fact that would lead me to the fields of languages came up: in a Christmas Night Eve my mother invited all the family to sit down in front of our living room TV in order to watch the Mass the pope was going to celebrate and we did it. As the Mass went on something extremely awesome caught my attention: the pope sent out a Christmas message to all over the world in at least fifty-seven languages and I got petrified by that ability of his. I went to bed that night knowing what I would like to do for the rest of my life: study every language I would come across in my lifetime.

Extract 4:

I grew up in the 60s, in the rock era and the first jeans, which in that time were called "Lee pants". The American culture influence brought by music, films and buying society bombed us day and night. And I... studied German... My sister, 5 years older than me, studied English at "InterAmericano" in Curitiba. And I... studied German. It's not that I didn't like German, but it was much more "cool", using a slang, to study English.

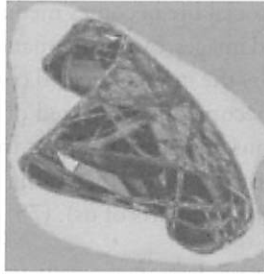
In extract 3, the same mass transmitted on TV to millions of people caused a change in that specific individual. Many others who watched the mass went on with their daily patterns of life, but to that individual a different message was sent. We may ask ourselves why that specific individual had that reaction to that discourse. Perhaps for some time this person had already been thinking about the choices he/she would have to make in a near future; in other words, maybe this person was already in a critical state, approaching the moment of rupture. In this example the bifurcation of the self was caused by inner motives or, using the chaos terms, by the system itself in a state of self-organized criticality. In extract 4, however, the bifurcation was caused by some external perturbation, meant by the access to a different discourse – in the extract, the discourse of the 60s.

With new identities there are new possible courses of action and new movement patterns – to use the concepts borrowed from Chaos Theory; in other words, new attractors emerge which are called "strange attractors."

3.3 Strange attractor

In dynamic and chaotic systems, the attractors are not stable points or cycles, but a pattern of movement which never repeats itself; it's a system that never returns to the same place. This kind of attractor has a fractal form and is sensitive to small changes. According to Lewin, they are not stable but change the dynamic possibilities each time the environment changes (93). This new kind of attractor received the name of *strange attractor*³ (picture 4).

³ Stewart explains that the name "strange attractor" is a "declaration of ignorance," since whenever mathematicians are not able to explain something, they treat it as "pathological, abnormal or strange" (134).



PICTURE 4 - Strange attractor.

The strange attractor is typical of chaotic systems. Each bifurcation point creates a change in the movement pattern of that attractor. As it is sensitive to small changes, a minimum change in the environment can cause a bifurcation and a consequent change in the pattern. Because it is always changing, and because it's sensitive to the environment, it's difficult – if not impossible – to predict exactly the dynamic possibilities it will take, although it's possible to be aware of some probable behavior if we examine all possibilities of change in the environment. The problem is that the range of possibilities is infinite and we never know for sure which of them will cause a rupture. Because of this, it seems the pattern changes at random, or in a chaotic manner. However, if one looks back to the movement pattern, it's possible to identify the points which caused the bifurcations and to acknowledge an underneath order. In other words, it's possible to visualize the order within the chaos.

3.3.1 Strange attractor and identity

As the strange attractors change the dynamic possibilities each time the environment changes, so identity is also sensitive to environment changes. As it was stated by Josselson, “the identity is the interface between the individual and the world, and its elements may be altered according to the environment around us” (qtd in Golafshani).

We have already seen that each individual follows his/her route up to certain decision points in which a specific discourse may appeal to him or her and cause a bifurcation in his/her path. This bifurcation contributes to the generation of a new identity. The more society becomes mediated by global culture, more discourses are offered to the individual and may cause the bifurcations. As Hall observed,

The more the social life becomes mediated by the global market of styles, places and images, by the international trips, by the images from the media and by the interconnected communication systems, more the identities become disconnected of times, places, histories and specific traditions and seem to “float freely.” We are confronted by several different identities (each one appealing to us, or better, appealing to different parts of us). (75)

There is an infinite number of possibilities opened for the individual and it is impossible to predict which of them will appeal to him/her. Therefore, it is impossible to predict which new identities may or may not emerge in the individual's life. It also seems to happen without a clear explanation or implicit order, or, as Hall put it, identities “seem to float freely” (75). However, the same way we reflected before about the strange attractor, if we look back to the social history of this individual, it will be possible to acknowledge some points in which the contact with some discourses contributed to the emergence of multiple identities. Furthermore, as the strange attractors are patterns of behavior that never repeat themselves, so individuals, in each social experience lived, are always new people. Nobody leaves one social encounter the same way he/she entered it. We are always reconstructing ourselves with our social experiences and according to the discourses brought to us by the social institutions.

Returning now to Bakhtin, these different discourses offered by the social institutions represent the centrifugal forces of the language. They contribute to the heteroglossia and carry on “the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and desunification” (“The Dialogic Imagination” 272). The author identifies the existence of both forces in language – centripetal and centrifugal, but he recognizes that the later are more important.

To exemplify what has been argued so far, let us take a look at some other extracts from the *AMFALE* narrative corpus:

Extract 5:

It was not the teaching, but myself. I started to discover things that had gave me motivation to learn English. At that time I started to have contact with interesting stuff in English, specifically music and RPG. The music I started to listen was the English and the American Rock and Roll and the RPG was, at that time, a game that had all the rules in English.

Extract 6:

Then I went to high school, where English classes are simply awful. Every year the same subjects were taught to us, such as verb to be, negative forms, interrogative forms etc. However, the sport I have been practicing from that period so far is full of English words and expressions, what made me more interested in English. In fact skateboard has been a 'catapult' to my English learning process.

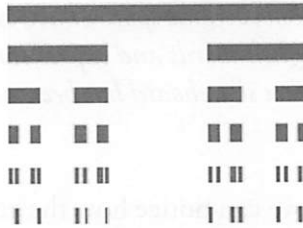
In both extracts we can notice how the access to new discourses contributed to the emergence of new selves. Also, we can see how those discourses contributed to group identities: a rock'n roll person and an RPG player (extract 5), and a skateboard person (extract 6). Those group identities in interaction caused the emergence of new identities: language students. In extract 6, it's also interesting to observe that the person mentions the "student" identity, associated to the social institution "school," and contrary to what many would think, it was not this identity that triggered language acquisition, but his social identity as a "skateboard guy."

As it was argued before, the strange attractors have a fractal form. That's what we are going to talk about in the next section.

3.4 Fractals

A fractal is a geometric figure which is self-similar in different scales and represents the mathematics of Chaos. The term was created by Benoit B. Mandelbrot in 1977 when he surprised his math colleagues asking about the length of the British Coast. A question that apparently had an obvious answer was used by Mandelbrot to prove the math of Chaos. He proved that the British coastal length was, in fact, infinite. If we look from above, there is a physical limit to the coast, but when we approach the length of observation, it is possible to see that the external limit has infinite possibilities of internal fragmentation. Each depression, lake, small holes, and so on, contributes to increase the length of the coast, although it is still limited by an external demarcation – it has an infinite perimeter within a finite area. What is interesting to observe is that no matter the level of approach used in observation, each part presents the

same properties of the whole. To understand better the properties of the fractal, let us examine picture 5.



PICTURE 5 - Cantor Dust.⁴

Picture 5 shows a segment between two points A and B. If we take the medium thirds of this segment AB, we have other smaller segments which are self similar to the AB segment. If we keep doing this same procedure, we have smaller segments, but all of them self-similar to the whole. We have infinite possibilities of internal fragmentation, limited by the length of the segment AB. Now let us see how all of this can relate to identity issues.

3.4.1 Fractals and identity

It has already been argued that multiple selves coexist within the same person and those multiple selves emerge due to different social contexts, the social roles of the individuals in the social encounters and according to the discourses presented by the different social institutions throughout the individual's lifetime.

Taking the properties of fractals mentioned above, although we are externally limited by our human embodiment, that is, by our physical nature and by our social historical experiences, we still have infinite possibilities of internal subdivisions. To each discourse we affiliate, in each social community we take part, a new self emerges and we have infinite possibilities of internal fragmentations. As proposed by Giddens, "such a

⁴ This model was created by Henry Smith (1875) and used again by George Cantor (1883) to explain the fractal properties (see Stewart 134).

view is often thought to imply that an individual has as many selves as there are divergent contexts of interaction” (“Modernity and self-identity” 417).

In spite of this, Giddens suggests the diversity of social contexts also contributes to unification. According to him, “a person may make use of diversity in order to create a distinctive self-identity which positively incorporates elements from different settings into an integrated narrative” (“Modernity and self-identity” 418). It is exactly because only a single individual has lived his/her social experiences, has had his/her social encounters and finds himself/herself in a coordinate of time and space that is occupied just by himself/herself that we can say that he or she is unique. This is the great paradox of identity – we are unique exactly because we are socially constituted.

Borrowing the concept of fractals once again, regardless of how many internal fragmentations we have, we are still limited by who we are. In other words, we are one with infinite possibilities of internal subdivisions. Then we come to the second property of the fractals – self-similarity. Although there are those internal subdivisions, we are not pieces of ourselves. Each self has the same properties of the whole individual and the individual is unique just because it keeps the same properties of his/her internal selves. The several selves do not coexist in isolation, but interact among themselves. It means that I am the mother I am because I was the daughter I was, because I am the researcher, the teacher, etc. that I am. One could ask: “which identity aligns all the others?” The answer is quite simple: no one. Just like the gestalt property of “figure/background,” each time one identity emerges, all the others are in the background contributing to the one which is in the fore.

Having the concepts of Chaos in mind, especially the properties of fractals presented here, it is now time to argue for the substitution of the widely used term “fragmented identities” to “fractalized identities.”⁵ Fragmentation evokes the idea of isolated pieces that do not interact with

⁵The idea of using the term “fractalized identities” to refer to the multiple identities which coexist in a person was suggested by Dr. Vera Lúcia Menezes de O. e Paiva – my supervisor. I’d like to pay her a tribute for that and acknowledge her important suggestion to use this term.

each other. Fractalization evokes the properties of fractals and can explain better the arguments presented so far, that is, the fact that the multiple identities coexist in interaction within the same individual, and it's due to this very interaction that the human being has a social identity that is unique. The negotiation of those fractalized identities may contribute to or hinder language acquisition, as we can see in extracts 7 and 8 below.

Extract 7:

My life is confuse because I'm married I have a son and I don't have money. So I don't have free time to study. When I started study my son was four months and he cried a lot, but my first teacher here didn't understand my life and she told me that study was more important than everything. I didn't think with her, so I didn't ready speak, learn English. Now I don't speak English but I like it and I want to speak, ready, learn English. I need learn English. This is very important in my life.

Extract 8:

My first impulse for learning a foreign language, English, to be more specific, was not to be here where I am now, studying for becoming an English teacher. No, before that there was my passion for another kind of language (if could call it like that, I am sorry for the musicians if I cannot), "music". (...) I may be sorry for being here, taking the place of somebody who is and wants to be a teacher, but I cannot be sorry for the time that I have passed here, for all that I have learned thanks to this course, I have learned so much about so many things and about myself. My experience here, more than academic or professional, was personal. The knowledge I am holding with me for ever in golden frame. The degree I will send to my family is black silk paper.

In extract 7, it's possible to identify several identity fractals: wife, mother and a student. The negotiation among those many selves is not done in harmony and thus, hinders language acquisition. In a similar way, in extract 8, we can also identify several fractals: language student, prospective teacher, musician, and son. The negotiation of the multiple selves, however, is well accomplished and the person is able to deal with those fractals in order to improve his or her opportunities to learn.

4. Final comments

There is no doubt that the postmodern era is marked by a process of fragmentation of the self, but this fragmentation may also lead to unification. Accepting the challenge of using a new theoretical framework introduced by the Chaos theory, it was possible to better understand the paradox of the individual who is unique because he or she is socially constituted. I also argued that the term “fragmented identities” would not properly explain this paradox and a new term, based on the concept of “fractals,” was suggested: “fractalized identities.”

The challenge of studying the relation between foreign language acquisition and identity issues showed that identity, far from being just one aspect of learning, is, indeed, an important matter if we are to have a holistic view of the complexity which encompasses this process. While matters such as national identity can have a weaker impact on learning in such contexts, other issues related to group identity and social institutions effects on individual identity emerge as something worth reflecting upon. Finally, it was demonstrated that the Chaos theory can be a useful theoretical tool available to Applied Linguists if we are to account for the complexity which involves processes of language acquisition and identity reconstruction. After all, we should remember, as Bezerra has stated, that “the human being is this amalgam of vicissitudes which make it irreducible to exact definitions.”⁶

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⁶ Paulo Bezerra in the introduction to *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski*, p.xi.

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Some Crucial Elements of Learning Ecologies of Linguistic Contagion¹

Tim Murphey

Kanda University of International Studies

Administrators, teachers, and students—all learners, ideally—can be learning-innovators. That is, they can continually create better conditions together, an ecology, that can hothouse language learning. Wilga Rivers advocated much the same many years ago, emphasizing student-centered teaching and teacher agency to act in support of everybody's learning:

We must find out what our students are interested in. This is our subject matter. As language teachers we are the most fortunate of teachers—all subjects are ours. The essence of language teaching is providing conditions for language learning—using the motivation which exists to increase our student's knowledge of the new language; we are limited only by our own caution, by our own hesitancy to do whatever our imagination suggests to us to create situations in which students feel involved ... We need not be tied to a curriculum created for another situation or another group. We must adapt, innovate, improvise, in order to meet the student where he is and channel his motivation. (Rivers 96, my underlining)

I wish to describe four crucial activities to enhance learning ecologies, noting that there may be many more. In the following sections I wish to first clarify some terms, then describe these four activities more clearly, and provide some examples of such ecologies.

¹ Thanks to Ana Maria Barcelos for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

But first let me give a glimpse of my conclusion briefly so readers know where I am headed and can better evaluate the arguments in its favor. My conclusion is that: using something, correctly and incorrectly in a supportive ecology, is the major way that one acquires the skill of its use. When we can do the activity with a supportive group, we tend to do it more and access the social capital (Bourdieu) needed to do it intensively. I contend that this is as true of learning to drive as it is of language acquisition. The trouble with most foreign language learning is that students have precious little time behind the wheel.

In other words: *Using language, correctly and incorrectly, in supportive ecologies is the major way that one acquires the skill of its use.* Older learners (those over 8 years old) do this through enormous acts of bravery.

Terminology

The word “ecology” is often used in every day speech as a synonym for the natural world or in conjunction with environmental activism. Ecological science is “the scientific study of the distribution and abundance of living organisms and how their properties are affected by interactions between the organisms and their environment” (“Ecology”).

Thus, I understand a *learning ecology* to be an environment in which learners interact optimally and naturally with their environment and others in order to learn efficiently things that are important to know in their particular environments. In the literature these may go by several names: communities of practice (Lave and Wenger), affinity spaces (Gee), and generative learning communities (Pace-Marschall). van Lier’s conception of Ecological Linguistics “focuses on language as relations between people and the world, and on language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world” (4).

I have borrowed the word *contagion*, which we regularly use in the adjectival form “contagious” from *Emotional Contagion*, by Hatfield et al. in which they show how emotions are “caught” by others and how certain people’s emotions are extremely contagious. Human behavior in general might be sometimes compared to flocks of birds or schools of fish who seem to follow unknown leaders and imitate behaviors for various reasons, cultural and/or otherwise. However, most humans can develop the ability

to see these patterns and develop the agency to choose to follow the ones that we wish to. The emotions are a subset of these communicable behaviors as Hatfield et al. have so eloquently documented.

I propose that *language use* is another overlapping and pervasive subset of contagious human behavior—overlapping because *language use* involves and expresses emotions at the same time. Far from being rare, we see linguistic contagion happening early on in nearly every child's L1 environment with caretakers who adjust and scaffold dynamically to a child's increasing competence by flooding their environment with appropriate communications. We also see how slang often catches on like wild fire, especially among the young. However, in L2 institutionalized learning, the opposite tends to occur. We rarely see intensive interaction that occupies minds in a target language among a group of learners in a school for any sustained length of time. Instead, we see a transmission model of pedagogy in which it is assumed that explanations about the language will transfer to language use.

Learning ecologies of linguistic contagion thus describe rich learning environments in which rapidly spreading activation occurs neurologically within individuals, as well as socially within groups, due to highly contagious and pervasive communications, involving persons locally in using the language constructively. "Hot-housing" language development and learning is what ecologies of linguistic contagion are about. Hawkins suggests "the need for a shift in the teacher's role: from designing lessons to designing ecologies" (79). Van Lier similarly holds that "The ecological approach to education asserts that ultimately the quality and the lasting success of education are primarily dependent on the quality of the activities and the interactional opportunities available to learners in the educational environment." Such ecologies would be rich in "learning opportunities" (Allwright) and "affordances" (van Lier) that facilitate language learning. Immersion education would seem to have been somewhat successful in this regard, but not always.

The main question for L2 educators is how to facilitate the creation of learning ecologies of linguistic contagion. That is, *how can we co-construct with other learning-innovators environments in which we interact so intensively that we carry on the interactions beyond the classroom, with others and in our minds, and "hothouse" our learning in such a way that we*

can better identify ourselves as active users of our capital with rapidly growing competencies?

I recognize that this happens to small groups of my students and individuals as they report in their learning logs, for example, English running through their heads after a class for a few hours (Krashen's "din"), or students going to lunch with classmates and continuing to speak English. However, I want to know how to help students co-create these ecologies more easily and frequently so that more of them can enjoy the naturalness of learning a language through frequent and pervasive use (Tomasello). This exponential increase in use also facilitates better learning and thinking as we use language to talk about language and learning (Swain).

We need to explore multiple ways to create ecologies of linguistic contagion. This paper looks at what I see as four essential characteristics that deserve attention from learning-innovators: 1) relationship-centered learning which is about supportive group dynamics; 2) engagement with learning through intent participation and Deweying it!; 3) massive interactional opportunities in which participants engage in associative thinking; and 4) the celebration of efforts regardless of success. I will also give examples of successful learning ecologies that have included these characteristics.

Note that when I present these ideas at a conference I am able to better "walk my talk" and get an audience to actually experience some of the things I am talking about. In this written format I will attempt the same although it will depend more on the reader's interactive nature whether or not the ideas find grounding.

1. Relationship-centered learning: group dynamics

To form effective learning ecologies, groups of learning-innovators need to increasingly do the following:

1. Get to know who is there: to self-disclose and build trust. Without participants knowing each other little progress can be made toward supporting each other and feeling secure enough to risk in the group.

2. Make clear what will happen: the procedures and routines. Students who are unsure about the path the class will take and the routines that are expected of them remain unsettled and unfocused as they struggle to come to grips with what is expected of them. Later these paths can be democratically negotiated and still later we can handover control of the choosing with mature groups.
3. Create a safe & challenging atmosphere. Building that safety is also part of # 1 and #2 but there also needs to be appropriate challenge or we fall into boredom and meaninglessness. Providing activities within students' zones of proximal development (ZPDs) is crucial. This is a delicate balance that when done well produces flow (Csikszentmihaly).
4. Help all feel valued in the place of learning with a sense of contribution and appreciation. Belonging to a group means being supported by the group but also seeing oneself as a helpful resource in the group.

Doing these four things helps participants find a sense of community, identity, and motivation which are co-constructing concepts. As learning-innovators, we imagine ideal selves (Dornyei) in imagined communities (Norton) that draws us to invest more and more (be motivated) in the outcomes we wish to achieve. These things do not happen much in a teacher fronted and controlled classroom. They are more apt to happen in guided small group interaction in which individuals are given the conditions in which they can use their natural abilities and desires to make friends and seek challenges, i.e. socialize (Dornyei and Murphey). When participants *like* who they are within a group and feel valued as contributors they are more likely to invest (Norton) in the group, enhancing the group for other members as well.

Relationships among peers in a class do not appear to be a concern for many teachers at first. However, it is in fact a primary motivational aspect for investment in the work of a class. This is supported by the extensive research of Judith Rich Harris who found that peers have more influence on each other than parents and other adults. To me, language classes especially are exceptionally suited to attend to friendship-making

(Murphey, "Friends") through the target language, and since we are "the most fortunate of teachers, all subjects are ours" (Rivers) we can organize some class time around explicit friendship-making and developing better group dynamics.

2. Engagement through intent participation and Deweying it!

In many of my presentations, I give participants a riddle and ask them to write in their answers (see box 1)

Box 1

Riddle: Some research showed that students in the US retain approximately ___% of what they (say, hear, read, see, do, or combinations). What do you think? Write in your answers.

10% of what they _____

26% of what they _____

30% of what they _____

50% of what they _____

70% of what they _____

90% of what they _____

According to Silverman the answers in this particular research show that students learn:

10% of what they READ

26% of what they HEAR

30% of what they SEE

50% of what they SEE & HEAR

70% of what they SAY

90% of what they SAY while DOING or DO while SAYING

I explain to the audience that this is just one small research report and there could be many variations in different contexts. Also, by the time students get to the point where they can talk and perform something, they have probably already read about it, and seen and heard about it from

others. So the research is not saying that reading, or audio-visual learning are ineffective, rather it is saying that *just* doing these things are ineffective for long term retention and that performing, doing and saying, are what allow us to construct and retain more long term representations of the knowledge. Any performer who can get the audience involved in the performance, will also achieve greater audience identification with the process, role, or conceptualization.

So the major question I ask after this riddle is, “Who learns the most in schools?” It does not take long for people to realize that *teachers* are the ones who learn the most in schools because they are indeed the ones performing the most. Thus, if we really want our students to learn more, we need to figure out ways for them to act like teachers, i.e. to perform and teach each other.

To drive this point home, I also show my audiences a comic strip of “For Better or Worse” in which a mother is first shown typing at an old fashion type writer. Her adolescent son comes along and says its time she learned how to use the word processor (computer). So he shows her how to log in, create a file, name it, save it, and print it out in the next few frames. However, throughout the frames, she never touches the keyboard but just looks on admiringly. The last frame shows her again typing alone at her old typewriter, leaving the reader to make their own conclusions. When I give this to many undergraduates they immediately think of the saying, “Old dogs can’t learn new tricks.” I ask them to think more. Usually someone does remark that she did not learn because she did not do anything, she only watched and that was not enough to actually hold on to the process. Here audience members are remembering themselves being shown something at the computer and remembering that if they do not take control of the keyboard themselves, they probably will not remember the process. Observational learning can only go so far, then we need deeper involvement to go the rest of the way—we need to be the performers. In short, if you want to be able to do it, you have to do it. Correctly or incorrectly matters little at first; both lead toward doing it correctly in the end and gathering more information about your performance and how you can do it.

Even having the intent to participate, researchers have found, makes our observations and attention more acute. “Observers’ attention

is likely to be quite different if they expect to be involved than if they observe incidentally . . . Our term ‘intent participation’ refers to keenly observing and listening in anticipation of or in the process of engaging in an endeavor” (Rogoff et al. 178).

However, if we never actually perform, this intent dies a quick death and the degree of participation weakens. Lave and Wenger write eloquently of legitimate peripheral participation which allows people to access the learning process and identify with it as peripheral participants through observation. Ideally, these peripheral participants then gradually move toward the center of the activity through increasingly scaffolded takeover of the doing. However, when teachers only lecture, they may be keeping students on the peripheral too long and any intent to actually participate more fully seems to be too distant to be substantial, thus demotivating students to merely studying for the test, not for the actual use of the material.

Another observation that often comes from this comic strip is the idea of the *apprenticeship of observation*. It takes great amounts of observation to unconsciously form a belief (which is often unconscious). These are what we often call cultural traits and beliefs, things learned unconsciously from years of observation, but which may in fact be dysfunctional. When students watch teachers explain things year after year, they assume that they now know how to teach—you just explain something to someone (the transmission model of teaching). Many have absorbed this conception of teaching merely from observation. The young boy in the comic strip may not enjoy school, but he assumes that the way to teach is simply to explain. And when students like him become teachers they will often replicate the fallacy of *transmisery education*. We need to better understand our hidden beliefs and understandings, for as Pace-Marshall says, “Our beliefs and assumptions about learning and about how children learn are the most powerful ‘rules’ in schools—they are largely invisible” (38).

Finding the right amount of performance weight for students so that they are neither bored nor stressed out is important. Without intent participation and engagement in *doing* students usually are tuned out and unengaged with others in social learning as the person sleeping on the left in figure 1. They either have no images or random images that come into their minds.

On the other hand, with too much stress, a person's fear can greatly inhibit learning from performances as with the example on the far right whose fear inhibits learning. In the examples, later we will see how peer to peer interaction seems to work for most students in that they need to perform, but it is not in front of a class or teacher. There are expectations and they do want to look good in front of their peers, but it is not debilitating.

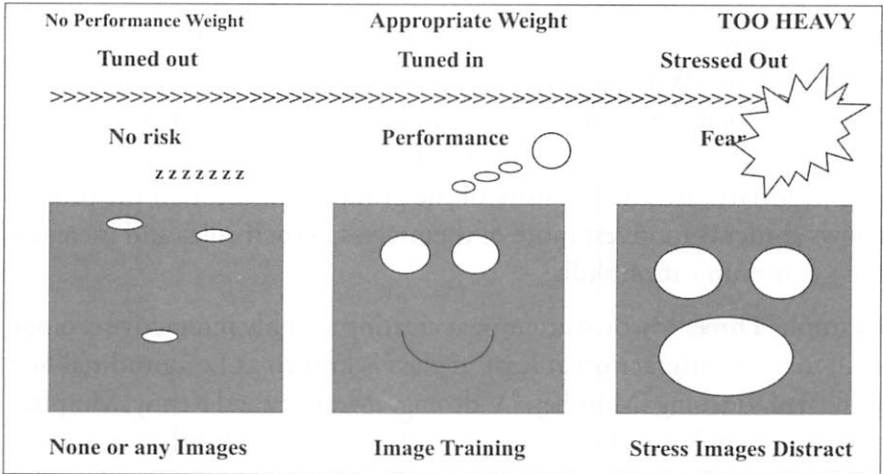


FIGURE 1 - Intent Participation & Performance Weight.

3. Massive interaction (three examples) and associative thinking

Example One: Randy Pausch describes in a recent video his MA program at the Entertainment Technology Center (ETC) at Carnegie Mellon University. This is a two year professional Masters Degree combining virtual reality computing with the arts. All time the time in this program is spent working in small groups on edutainment projects. The first semester they have 5 two-week projects in randomly assigned small groups and receive peer feedback after each two week session. They learn quickly from their peers if they are not easy to work with. There is one larger project in each of last three semesters in different small groups. Pausch says there was no book learning, just intensive interaction in supportive small groups, creative and meaningful. He has companies already on a waiting list to sign up his graduates three years from now. This means that people

who have not joined the program yet are already assured of jobs. That is how much they trust the program.

Pausch's program is not a language program but it is still an example of a learning ecology. They are learning the skills of collaborative creation and cooperative group dynamics in order to produce their projects. Companies see this as more valuable than reading the cutting edge books on the theories of their fields.

Example Two: Yashima et al. report on the improved willingness to communicate (WTC) of Japanese students involved in a mock United Nations at their high school. Small groups of students research and report on different countries and then take their countries' positions in debates and negotiations. The intensity of the group work through the project allows students to invest more of themselves in their roles and increases their communication skills.

Example Three: My own attempt at creating a highly interactive ecology with massive interaction at least in class is known as Longitudinal Self Evaluated Videoing (Murphey, "Videoing," Murphey and Kenny; Murphey and Woo) involving a lot of near peer role modeling (Murphey and Arao) in which students can make friends and learn much from each other, also known as social capital (Bourdieu). Students have "multiple extended conversational opportunities" in pairs 5 to 8 times with different classmates in each class and are videoed in one of the conversations and given a recording to take home. This recording becomes an artifact from the classroom that they can further interact with and learn: they can simply watch it and take notes, transcribe it and correct errors, share it with family and friends, watch with the person they were recorded with and get stimulated recall feedback. At the end of a term, students have 10 to 12 5-minute video clips on their tape and can review and write a paper about how they have changed.

Probably the greatest common characteristic of these three examples is the massive peer-peer interaction. But why is peer-peer interaction so helpful for learning? One answer is that pair and small group work creates more *associative thinking* rather than parallel thinking, i.e. students learn more when their minds are trying to negotiate with other minds than simply thinking in isolation.

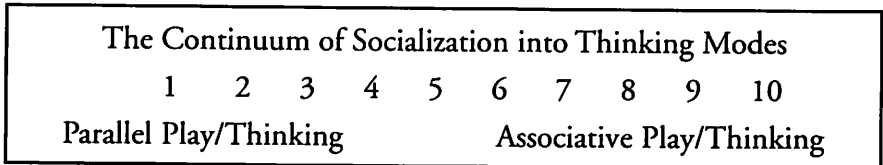
Associative thinking

Xu, Gelfer, and Perkins present the useful concepts of parallel play and associated play. Their research, done with second graders, supports the idea that the way that teachers structure instruction can greatly impact students' collaborative interaction and associative play, especially for English language learners. This coincides with much of what collaborative learning (Jacobs, Power, & Loh) and interactive SLA research supports (Murphey, "You and I"). The terms *parallel play* and *associative play* open a door to more clarity about the importance of collaboration.

Parallel play is when children may be together but their playing is individual and parallel with each other. It was Piaget who first noted this when he described young pre-school egocentric speech coming from children who were all sitting at the same table but playing in parallel, not really together. That is, they were using speech to regulate their own personal play activities without regard to the other children. This is OK in an early stage, but associative play, playing together with a common focus, might be more productive of socialization and cognitive development as children are involved in the same game or fantasy and co-create contexts and rules.

I wish to theorize further on the distinctions between *parallel* and *associative* using observations that I think are common to teachers and students alike and extend *play* to *thinking*. I will briefly describe a few scenarios to illustrate a continuum from parallel play/thinking to associative play/thinking (see figure 2), drawing on a previous article (Murphey and Kobayashi).

FIGURE 2



At the lowest level we have parallel play/thinking when students may be physically together but they are involved in their own private worlds of play and thinking and imagining, quite similar to a group of people in a train, each in their own private world of thought. Imagine

being in a class in which the teacher talks all the time and you will only have a final exam from a textbook that you can read outside of class. Yet nevertheless, attendance is required and so you go and look at your teacher talking for the complete class. Chances are most readers have had such a class or two in their past and will recognize that parallel play/thinking may have been their dominant mode of being there (“out to lunch” describes this way of “being there”).

We all know that we have performed this behavior in classes in which we were not interested and gotten away with it. Even when students’ intentions are to listen and think along with a speaker (teacher/lecturer), if there is no obligation to respond with other than minimal clues of attending, the mind tends to go into parallel thinking modes and often in the end loses out to the internal meanderings of the mind. Students can look teachers straight in the face, smile and nod, and still be thinking about something else—we all have done this. In such situations, students are mentally aware of someone else but only superficially attending with no obligation to participate. In such situations, students are usually pretty relaxed because very little is expected of them, other than to give occasional eye contact and sit with an appearance of listening.

Now imagine that the teacher had the habit of calling randomly on several students in every class to read a passage in the textbook, but not to comment on it, just read. In order not to be embarrassed, you would have to pay a bit more attention to the page and pace of the teacher. This would probably push your mind into superficial mental awareness.

The third level I would typify as “engaged to respond.” At this level, the mind and person is engaged (contracted) to respond more or less equally in a conversation by social convention (Grice’s Maxims) and thus attends to the partner more closely, indeed, must pay attention in order to respond appropriately. Imagine now that your teacher’s way of teaching and grading was to read a short passage and randomly call on students to explain what it meant and what they thought of it. The fear of being lost and not knowing what to say would probably make a lot of students read carefully and stay more attentive in the class. However, after being called on once, students would probably descend to parallel thinking again if chances of being called on again were small.

Imagine now that your teacher matched you up with a series of different partners in each class to discuss and teach different sections of the

textbook (peer tutoring) and you gave and received partner evaluations as to preparedness and helpfulness. The act of having to discuss a text with one other person would probably force you to be “engaged to respond” and stimulate you toward associative play/thinking in which two minds focus on one object and explore its dimensions. This type of engagement gives agency (demands it) to the minds involved. So the question for teachers becomes “How do we construct activities to gently allow people to take more agency and do more associative thinking rather than parallel thinking?” Xu et al. certainly provided an excellent way with even second grade students—peer tutoring.

There is still yet perhaps a more intense form of associative thinking than being focused with a peer, and that is having many people in your head at the same time. Here I would suggest that when students compose forums in a web programs like Blackboard or WebCT, etc., they often have read the group’s comments and have an internal conceptualization of their audience and how the individuals might respond. Thus, as they compose, they are thinking associatively with an imagined community (Norton). As Lapadat states, “An important element in this online interactivity is that there is a real audience” (11). Even I, somewhat for this short piece, have certain people in my head that seem to be holding positions and I am dialoging with them (e.g., “Julian, you’ll like this and certainly respond with something I have never thought of.” “Yaoying, you know so much about kids, I wonder what you will think of this play/thinking connection”).

Note, it is not a question of doing away with parallel thinking, which may be a natural survival-of-the-species way to cope with boredom, incomprehension, and isolation (at least we are still thinking!) and may also be a feeder for associative thinking. The question becomes, “If we recognize associative thinking as very productive of learning and yet rather rare in our schools, how can we organize people (teachers and students) so they have more opportunities to think together, doing associative thinking rather than falling into the default parallel-thinking-mode even when they are together?”

Associative play/thinking may be another way of describing what Vygotsky called the social plane, “Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between two

people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category” (Vygotsky 163). Xu et al.’s article describes a wonderful way to help students get onto that social plane through peer tutoring. Edge’s work on cooperative development and the *TESOL Quarterly Dialogues* (Sharkey & Johnson) are also pointing in this direction for teacher development. SLA people would conceptualize it something like this: the goal of comprehensible input (Krashen, *Second Language*) occurs most often when people can adjust (Long’s adjustment hypothesis) to each other, which they can only do in interaction (Allwright’s interaction hypothesis) and through revealing their thinking in talk (Swain’s output hypothesis). So when can people interact and adjust the most to create comprehensible input and output? Most probably not in teacher-fronted classes, but rather in dyads and small groups of communicating students willing to teach and learn from each other. Swain has called this “collaborative dialogue.”

I feel that we are probably always doing parallel thinking to some extent (that is the nature of our constructive ability to combine our own thoughts while streaming others at the same time). Our attempts at associative thinking are probably often under assault by rogue parallel worlds much of the time. But when we are engaged with just one other person in a conversation, we usually attend to people maximally in order to be able to react appropriately and contribute to the dialog. This requirement to contribute, I suggest, is the main reason we attend so much in these circumstances. To realize the real fruit of parallel thinking, we need to externalize it and make it into an object that others could act upon associatively (Swain). This of course socializes otherwise private parallel thinking into associative thinking. Figure 3 seeks to depict some of these contrasts between parallel and associative thinking, however, in the end, we probably want to regularly travel to both ends of the continuum at least periodically and benefit from the advantages both offer.

FIGURE 3

<u>Parallel play / thinking / study</u>	<u>Associative play / thinking / study</u>
Alone in our own minds	Communicating with others
Not sure what others think	Know more about what others think
Thoughts rarely externalized	Thinking out loud, sharing of writing
Few opportunities to model	Massive opportunities to model
Few opportunities to adjust	Massive opportunities to adjust
More isolated	More communal
Less socialization	More socialization

4. Celebration

When we have relationship-centered learning in supportive groups that encourage intent participation, near peer role modeling, and engagement with great amounts of interaction that can stimulate associative thinking, then we have a pretty good ecology going, perhaps an *ecological learning flow*. These concepts all co-construct one another and can help create a dynamic learning ecology of linguistic contagion. It is also effective to have celebration as an element in the co-constructing concepts and if possible to see celebration as a way of being with the appreciation of all that you are learning and the relationships that you are cultivating.

Tom Peters said many years ago, "Celebrate what you want to see more of," and indeed celebrating something seems to make it come more often. The business field of appreciative inquiry has found that simply asking people "What is working well?" can create an environment where people are concentrating more on what works. Joy, pleasure, and celebration provide meaningfulness to what we do. Having a good time learning a language would seem to be a wise thing to cultivate within our profession. The more you celebrate the learning, the more learning there is apt to be.

Conclusion

For purposes of summarizing, figure 4 below seeks to contrast some of the differences between the tradition of structure and ecologies of linguistic contagion:

FIGURE 4

<u>Tradition of Structure Conservative Tendencies</u>	<u>Learning Ecologies of Linguistic Contagion (in/out of class)</u>
1. Language held as frozen structures	Fluid language use (Tomasello)
2. Students study the structure of L	Use language to learn content (CBI)
3. Little target language USE	Lots of target language USE
4. Unneeded pain and frustration	Pleasure and fun permitting more effort
5. A lot of high stakes testing	A lot of level appropriate performing
6. Little confidence and motivation	Generates confidence and motivation
7. No intent participation	Lots of intent to participate
8. Near Peer Role Models not apparent	Near Peer Role Models made visible
9. Little sense of community/ideal selves	Strong sense of community/ideal selves
10. Little teacher/student choice	Lots of teacher/student choice (autonomy)
11. Little or no celebration	Continual celebration ideally

While learning ecologies may at times be messy, complex, and chaotic (a zoo even), when they are rich enough in interaction, heart and celebration, they will usually facilitate linguistic contagion—like a child absorbing the songs of loving caretakers.

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Authorship in Materials Design for Language Teaching

Vilson J. Leffa

Universidade Católica de Pelotas

1. Death and survival in materials design

The idea of materials production in language teaching has always been associated with cutting and pasting. In the pre-digital era, teachers used scissors to cut magazines and newspapers to prepare their activities. In the computer age, they use browsers to download files from the Internet, break them up into pieces and merge these pieces into a new file. The new process is apparently the same, but the final product is graphically very different, as the patchwork look of pre-digital era is removed. I will refer to the first process, originally with scissors and magazines, as bricolage. For the second process, with downloaded files, I will use the French word *recyclage*.

I will also argue that bricolage has not disappeared, but was reintroduced under a new form. Bricolage on paper was traditionally made up of small pieces put together side by side, as the parts, taken from separate wholes, were physically compressed on the page. Paper bricolage was centripetal, as the pieces from the outer world converged to the confines of the page. Bricolage on the Internet, on the other hand, is centrifugal; it is not made up of parts, compressed in one place, but of wholes, involving complete archives, which are connected to other archives, scattered all over the world.

Both bricolage and *recyclage* are closely related to the idea of authorship. I will try to assess to what extent the introduction of Information

and Communications Technologies (ICTs) into the field of language teaching has affected teacher's capacity to exercise authorship in materials production. Foucault's ideas on authorship and Barthes' considerations on the death of the author will be used here.

In *recyclage*, authorship is preserved, but the material produced by the teacher is dangerously simplified, as linguistic diversity is reduced. In *bricolage*, on the other hand, diversity is assured but authorship may be definitely lost.

The *bricolage/recyclage* dichotomy in materials production poses three challenges for the teacher. The first is the need to keep a balance between the centripetal and centrifugal forces, avoiding both too much diversity, which may confuse the student, and too much uniformity, which may be boring and kill student interest. The second challenge involves the decision between exercising authorship, thus having a grip over the activity that is being prepared, or relinquishing it, thus losing control to the student. The third challenge arises from the complexity of materials design in a net society, which entails the need to evolve from an individualized concept of work to a collective one, forming a team and sharing responsibilities with the others.

These three challenges are fused into one big challenge, which is the challenge of survival. Along with Barthes' idea that the reading of the book is the death of the writer, it can also be argued teaching materials produced by teachers are the means through which they survive. With materials design, teacher's actions can be extended beyond the classroom, both in terms of space and time. In the classroom, the teacher may discover the small pleasure of watching his or her students building knowledge with the artifacts that he or she has produced, which may be similar to the pleasure experienced by the poet when listening to his poems being recited by actors on the stage. With distance education, the teaching material can be broadcast to other places, making the teacher synchronously present even when physically absent. The new technologies also allow teachers to expand their actions not only in space but also over time, by having their activities stored in virtual repositories, from which they can be recovered at a later time. The capability of being present asynchronously is certainly more challenging for the teacher, demanding a better understanding of the technology involved and the ability to work cooperatively. What

Barthes describes as death, the moment when the artifact is produced, may lead to survival, when the artifact is used by other people, either readers or students. The universal human desire for life after death is somehow replicated in materials design.

2. Recyclage

Two basic movements should be considered first. The first movement is the evolution from bricolage toward recyclage with the advent of ICTs, which not only introduced the idea of recyclage but also brought a new concept for bricolage, that is, we have a new technology to produce materials (recyclage) and a different kind of bricolage. The second movement is built around the notions of center and periphery, with an emphasis on the two forces that operate between them: the centripetal force, pushing from periphery to center, and the centrifugal force, from center to periphery.

The first movement, from bricolage to recyclage, explores the idea of fusion, in which individual and discrete elements are melted into a unique body, with the consequent loss of their previous individuality. Word processors such as Microsoft Word, for example, can do to different pieces of text what a pot can do to leftover pieces of soap. When I was a kid, my mother used to collect small pieces of soap around the house, put them in a pot on the stove, melt them and pour the melted soap on a container, producing a new bar of soap. The original shape, color and scent were individually lost and incorporated in a new bar of soap. There was no possibility of ever returning to the original pieces after the recycling process.

This is very similar to what we can do with a text processor today: different pieces of work, from different sources, can also be recycled into a new text, with a unified font and page layout. The patchwork look of pre-digital bricolage is replaced by a seamless text in which the borders between the pieces disappear. The individual contributions to the collective work, which was clearly marked before, when scissors and glue were used, disappear now and give place to a unified piece of work.

The second movement refers to the notion of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The opposition between center and periphery is probably one of the most frequent axioms in every field of knowledge, from

nanoscience, involved with matter on an ultra-small scale, to astrophysics, concerned with giant galaxies. Whereas in atomic chemistry, for example, the electrons turn around the nucleus, in astronomy we have satellites turning around planets, planets turning around suns, suns turning around central stars and galaxies turning around unseen centers. The center-to-periphery relationship is found in language as well, with nouns modified by determiners or topic sentences expanded into secondary ideas. The basic understanding is that center and periphery are kept in equilibrium by the use of two opposing forces: one that pushes the object away from the center (centrifugal force) and the other that pulls it towards the center (centripetal force). When these two forces are not in equilibrium the system breaks down, either by collapsing inward (imploding) or bursting outward (exploding). As usually happens with oppositions, one force cannot exist without the other.

De Beaugrande described the center/periphery opposition as one of the principles of reading. Bakhtin applied it to language in general, associating centripetal force with monologia, in which different genres are blended into only one rhetorical mode, officially enforced by government mechanisms. Heteroglossia, on the other hand, is a centrifugal force, moving towards diversity of rhetorical modes. Both forces are employed whenever language is used:

[E]very concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and decentralization, or unification and desunification intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well. (Bakhtin 272)

Because these two forces are always in operation whenever language is used, it is not possible to associate any of these forces to one place or to one moment. Center or periphery here are not places to be held when we are involved in materials design, for example. The association between recyclage and centripetal force, on one hand, and bricolage and centrifugal force, on the other, is done for pedagogical reasons only. In recyclage, we are involved in producing something; therefore, we have the illusion of being placed at the center, in a centripetal direction, producing a unified

discourse. We tend to aggregate things around a given point, like particles of iron attracted to a magnet and producing a unique pattern. Bricolage, on the other hand, is centrifugal, moving outward in dispersion. Unity of discourse cannot be maintained. In the pre-digital age, the worksheet prepared by the teacher, with patches pasted from different sources, had the look of a patchwork quilt. In the computer age, mainly with the introduction of the Web, a new form of bricolage was produced, more diverse than the previous one. Students are no longer exposed to a page where pieces of paper are put together; they are sent to websites located in different parts of the world.

Recyclage only became possible with the advent of the Internet. Before Internet, information was centralized, using mass media communication such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc. Information was concentrated in one place and characterized by restricted access and one-way communication. Restriction was imposed in terms of both space and time. Newspapers and magazines are unavailable in certain areas. Radio and television can only be used if we adapt to their schedules. Since communication operates in only one way, very few people have a chance to be heard or seen. The decision on what and when to inform does not depend on the millions of readers, listeners and watchers, who are exposed to these means of communication, but on the few who own them. Mass media communication is based on the podium metaphor, with the preacher traditionally standing above the silent audience, talking to them but not listening or even allowing for any dialogue to occur.

The printed word on newspapers and magazines, the spoken word on the radio, or the images seen on television can be described as hard information. They cannot be melted like the pieces of soap and molded into a different object. The technology usually available for the teacher in pre-digital times only allowed him or her to produce bricolages, either by cutting and pasting from newspaper and magazines or by tape recording pieces of audio and video from radio or television. The blocks – printed pages, audio or video – could be put side by side, but not fused into a new body.

Recyclage was extremely costly and practically available only to large enterprises. The COBUILD English language database, for example, a project from the University of Birmingham in the 1980's, was only possible because of a partnership between the university and the publisher

Collins. The project had a building of its own on the university campus, an infrastructure of computers and a whole staff dedicated to it. The textual database that was then made available for the production of dictionaries, grammars and textbooks, at the cost of a multi-million pound investment, corresponds to a fraction of what is available to a teacher today, at practically no cost. In other words, the individual teacher can use resources that are of a much greater magnitude than the resources created by the COBUILD Project, producing teaching materials to meet the individual needs of any group of students.

It is also obvious that if teachers decide to unite and work together, they can embark on larger projects. We are all familiar with Wikipedia, the on-line free encyclopedia, cooperatively produced by thousands of people who generously submit their contributions on their areas of specialization. There is no reason to suppose that groups of teachers could not produce wikitextbooks, wikigrammars, or even wikidictionaries, to be freely used by other teachers.

Repositories of learning objects, containing activities prepared by teachers, are becoming popular. The MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching), for example, has more than 15,000 learning objects. These repositories are places on the Web where teachers can store the activities they have prepared, so that they can be retrieved and used by other teachers. Repositories can be seen as educational trading posts where learning objects are displayed and bartered by interested teachers.

Typically, materials prepared by teachers are recycled from other materials. The idea is that authentic texts, as they exist in the world, have to be pedagogically treated before they can be presented to the student. Reading texts, for example, may be preceded by questionnaires to activate student previous knowledge or by some kind of language work to facilitate the reading task, usually involving unknown vocabulary or some syntactically complex structures.

Although meddling with the text itself has usually been regarded as something that should be avoided, it has also been done, mainly by removing some paragraphs and replacing some infrequent words. Editing the text, which was impossible with scissors and glue, is now done with some clicks of the mouse, graphically unifying the appearance of any text,

even if totally collated with pieces from other texts. Passages can be presented with blanks to be filled in by the student, or fragmented into smaller parts and scrambled to be reassembled later. Text reconstruction techniques through cues and hints have also been tried.

Comprehension questions, usually to be asked after the reading task is finished, have also been done. The student may be asked to recover explicit textual data, to understand between-the-lines information or even to interpret beyond-the-lines allusions.

These are obviously sensitive issues and reflect the difference between what teachers do and what they are told to do. Teachers apparently tend to overprotect their students by controlling the language they should be exposed to, in terms of lexis, syntax and topic. This is usually referred to as the aquarium metaphor. On the other hand, teachers are often told that students should be exposed to authentic language, as it is actually used in the real world, even if the students may not be able to understand it fully; usually referred to as the open-sea metaphor. The difference between theoretical approaches, usually based on some epistemological principles, and practical solutions, derived from classroom heuristics, is one of the challenges that language teachers have to cope with.

Recyclage is specifically concerned with the idea of a common core language, a unified set of lexis and structures that pervades all manifestations of language and its different genres. This may be seen as monologia, in Bakhtinian terms, as it sanctions the idea of unification. Teachers and textbook publishers tend to be seduced by the possibility of producing one piece of teaching material that can serve the needs of different students in different places and times. Much of their endeavor is spent on the quest of these unique and do-all language-learning materials, which can save teacher's time in planning their classes and increase publisher's profits in designing their textbooks.

3. Bricolage

The introduction of ICTs not only caused the evolution from scissors-and-paste bricolage to digital recyclage, but also introduced a different kind of digital bricolage. What was originally one process (paper bricolage) developed into two different processes (digital recyclage and

digital bricolage). The new bricolage is constructed on different concepts of both time and space, based on the general idea of ubiquity: everything is everywhere all the time. The physical world in which things have weight and dimensions (length, height, width) is redefined in terms of light. Digitally speaking, reality is a matrix of dots that are continuously turning on and off. There are no borders, no here and there, and the concept of place itself is lost. Nothing is fixed. The computer screen, like Hemingway's Paris, is a moveable feast: it goes with us wherever we go. The information we read on the screen is not located in one place in the world; it is located everywhere, because computer files are usually multiplied, leaving behind copies of themselves. The planet has the size of the computer screen. In digital bricolage the pieces of information we cut and paste on the screen are not placed side by side, on a bi-dimensional surface, as it happens in paper bricolage; on the computer, they are piled one behind the other, at the same time visible and invisible. With a click of the mouse, they can be brought to the front or sent to the back.

In paper bricolage and even in the early days of computing, everything was held in one visible place, either on the printed page in our hands or the desktop on the table. The desktop computer introduced light and invisibility, but we knew the information was somewhere inside the CPU or on the floppy disk. We learned how to save or record everything we wrote, making them invisible to our "yes," and we learned how to retrieve our written words back from invisibility. We had some glitches in the learning process and we all heard stories of writers who lost whole books to the inner recesses of their machines. Visible or not, we knew, however, that the data were produced and kept in one place.

With the introduction of the Web, the individual desktop computer was connected to other computers. We started with the primitive BBS (Bulletin Board System), connecting our individual computers to a small computer system over a phone line to download software, read news or exchange messages with other users. We soon evolved from BBS to WWW, moving from one system to millions of interconnected systems and to what has been termed as the second deluge, the deluge of information. In this deluge we are not all put together in the same Noah's Ark, but have individual arks to save and protect ourselves from the flood (Lévy, "Cibercultura"). We not only were flooded by information, but also

moved from the receiving end of information to the producing end, in which every memory pool, every group, every individual, every object, independent of diversity or location, can be turned into a producer (Lévy, “Tecnologias da Inteligência” 160).

It is because of this deluge that information is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Much of the information we consume is scattered over different sources and most of the time we don't care to check who produced it. We are more interested in content than in the author. When we look for something in the Wikipedia, we usually have no idea about who produced the articles. Whenever we use a search engine (Google, MSN Search, Yahoo, etc.) we only look for the authors' name if they happen to be the topic. We may be interested in articles on osteoporosis, DNA tests, or Paris hotels, but not on the people who wrote these articles. The most frequent search words in Google refer to topics. We may go to the Web to read about Shakespeare, but not Shakespeare himself. If we are interested in reading what he wrote, we would probably go to a printed book. Authorship is not a concern on the Web. What Roland Barthes said of the printed text is truer on the Web: language knows a subject, not a person.

The concept of time also changes, along with the growing discontinuity of objects in the Web, where nothing is permanent. “Now” can no longer be associated to a time of the day. We can no longer say “Now it's three o'clock,” for example, because in other places “now” is four, seven, nine, or any other time of the day. Permanence is also lost forever. Words are no longer engraved in stone, but in light, and may change at the speed of light. A text we download from a site may change overnight. Software is constantly updated. The most frequent search words used to access search engines change not only from one country to another, but also from one day to the next. Google's “hot trends” site, displaying what Web surfers are concerned with, is updated almost in real time. People's interests change with the flow of events and cannot be engraved in stone.

The use of information is not limited to reading but also to writing. As we get used to write connected to the Web, our productivity falls down when we are disconnected. What we write becomes one with what we read. Setting the border between what is ours and what is citation will probably have no purpose in a few years' time. Access to any chunk of text

will be so easy that anyone, at any time, will be able to segment text and associate the parts to different authors. What T. S. Eliot did in 1922 in *The Waste Land*, producing a poem that the uninitiated reader would appreciate best in hypertext format, for its innumerable references to other places, times and authors, is now recurrent on the web. *The Waste Land* is a previous version of Wikipedia. We now live in a permanent state of bricolage.

In terms of Education and language teaching, a good example of bricolage in materials production is the “WebQuest” model, created by Bernie Dodge. A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which the information needed to complete it comes from resources on the Internet. A typical WebQuest, according to Dodge, contains six blocks: Introduction, Task, Process, Resources, Evaluation and Conclusion. Optionally, a Teacher Page block, to help teachers on how to implement the WebQuest, and Credits may also be included. The basic six blocks should contain the following:

- Introduction: guides the student on the content of the WebQuest and raises interest;
- Task: summarizes what the student will have accomplished at the end of the activity;
- Process: describes the steps to be followed to complete the task;
- Resources: displays a pre-selected list of Web pages with information on the topic;
- Evaluation: describes the criteria that will be used to evaluate performance;
- Conclusion: summarizes what learners will have accomplished.

Bricolage, which was bi-dimensional with scissors and glue, becomes an event with the WebQuest. Students are not exposed to pieces of paper glued on a page, but sent to Websites that may be located anywhere in the world. Considering that these pages are constantly updated, the event is a moveable feast that cannot be predicted. The material produced by the teacher is no longer that static page of collated pieces of paper, but a dynamic event that may change from day to day without teacher’s later intervention.

4. Authorship

As far as the concept of authorship is concerned, five aspects are relevant in terms of this discussion: (1) the role of authorship in academia, where having a name under the title of an article is a question of life or death, the proverbial “publish or perish;” (2) the author’s presence in text, expanding from Buffon’s idea that “style is the man himself;” (3) the original idea of author as transgressor; (4) author as person and author as a represented figure, designation versus description in Foucault’s terms; (5) and, finally, the death of the author, based mainly on Barthes’ ideas.

In Academia, authorship has been traditionally associated with the idea of responsibility and credit for academic work. You are an author when you produce something of your own mind and you can put your name under the title, followed by your institutional affiliation. Being affiliated to a famous university contributes to your prestige, but you are exclusively responsible for your work. You have to abide by strict rules about how far you can go in respect to other authors, how to give them credit, how to cite them in your text, so that you cannot be accused of committing plagiarism, for example. In Academia, an author is a physical person in the real world, with a Social Security Number, bills to pay, kids in school, higher or lower levels of cholesterol. Authorship, in this case, involves a professional community, with rules and division of labor that tell you what you have to do to become an author, usually through some kind of an initiation process conducted by senior authors. The uninitiated students are prepared in these career-track courses to accomplish a pre-determined set of tasks that routinely transforms them into professional authors. Unlike fairy tales, folk stories, legends or jokes, scientific texts have to be attached to an author. In the words of Foucault, the author’s name assigns status and cultural value to a text, bringing more attention to it. In the publish-or-perish syndrome of the Academia, an academic journal publishing articles without author’s identification would probably be rejected by both readers and authors. Anonymity does not exist in Academia.

Author in text plays with the idea that authorship can be defined as personal traits that authors leave on what they write. The idea is that there is some kind of Joyceness in what James Joyce wrote, for example, that identifies the text as exclusively Joycean, some kind of psychological fingerprints scattered on his writings. Tracking authorship, based on these

traits, is a favorite whodunit in literary criticism, as seen in the detective work that has been conducted around the authorship of many poems and plays that have been alternatively assigned and unassigned to Shakespeare, along centuries of literary history.

Author as transgressor relates to the idea that behind a text there is always somebody that is responsible for it. According to Foucault, authorship started when the author became subject to punishment, by producing heresy, for example. Heretical thoughts, when expressed, are just words, and since words cannot be punished, the juridical and institutional system had to look for somebody that could be punished, the author behind the words. The idea of ownership is established; the author is held responsible for the words he wrote, as if he owned them. Later, the same idea of ownership gave rise to copyright rules.

The actual person, who is punished as a transgressor, or rewarded as an author with copyright revenues, exists in the real world, having an address somewhere, paying taxes, etc. The coupling between the name and the actual person was defined by Foucault as designation; the name Shakespeare, for example, identifies the person who lived in Stratford-upon-Avon. This is different from description, which is used to define the relationship between name and author. The name Shakespeare in this case would identify much more than the physical person who wrote poems and plays in England; it would apply to what he wrote. Thus, if we say that Shakespeare died in 1616, we are in the domain of designation; on the other hand, if we say that Shakespeare is still alive today, we are in the realm of description.

All this concern about authorship, either as a person collecting copyright royalties, a writer trying to infuse an individual style in his text, a scientist putting his name under the title, or a poet sacrificing his life to become immortal, started with the invention of writing. When we talk to people and tell them a story or a joke, we do not usually try to collect royalties for it; unlike novels and poems, most jokes are anonymous. We feel rewarded by making our friends laugh or enjoy what we tell them. When we write, however, our interlocutors disappear; we usually do not have our readers in front of us as we do with our listeners. We do not know when, how and by whom we are read. Our reader may be enjoying our text, or reading it for obligation's sake as a course assignment. Our contact

with our readers happens in absentia. We do not even have to be alive to be read. Most authors have been more read after they have died.

The idea that the invention of writing brought the death of subjectivity is not new of course. There are many ways to disappear in writing. The docile will disappear by following the norms taught in textbooks; the eager beaver by getting lost in a multitude of citations; everybody by surrendering to the reader: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (Barthes 146).

We obviously have to follow norms when we speak, but, in speaking, we can resort to a lot of collateral support such as gestures, eye contact, our own voice coming out of our mouth, the interlocutor's presence, besides other contextual props that contribute to project our subjectivity. When we tell a joke, for example, we can enrich it with many details (choice of lexis, intonation, etc.) that match with the traits of our personality and the immediate context, including the interlocutor we talk to. A joke told by a shy person, for example, may be very different from the same joke told by an extrovert; the same way as a joke told to a close friend may be different from the same joke told to a large audience. All these variables change with context and interact with our subjectivity. When we write, however, most of these aids are gone and we are left with a set of rules that are practically the same for everybody. A joke, written to be published in a book, tells very little about the person who wrote it. Unlike speech, writing is less affected by the immediate context and by our subjectivity. In some genres such as writing a petition, for example, the norms we have to follow are so rigid, that our subjectivity has no sway at all.

Writing does not derive from the author but from innumerable other texts, which we resort to as we write. We not only do not own the words we use; we do not own the texts we write. Writing is an exercise in bricolage. According to Barthes,

[A] text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning . . . but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. (145)

And finally a text is created not by the supposed creator, the author, but by the reader, who gives it its final shape. A text does not depend on

the inspiration and creativity of the writer. The author does not matter in the text; it is the reader that matters. That is where the meaning of the text can be found. Again, according to Barthes,

[A] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (146)

Foucault and Barthes are talking about printed texts, but their ideas can be easily moved to what teachers do when they produce materials for their classes. Teachers become authors only when they transgress or try to claim copyright revenues for their work.

It is extremely easy to commit transgressions when we teach. There are many government regulations we have to abide by, there is the educational system with guidelines of its own such as the National Curricular Parameters in Brazil, and there is always a dominant methodological paradigm (Audiolingual, Communicative, etc.) that teachers are supposed to adopt. These different systems constitute a code of belief that is very strong and operates like dogma. Producing teaching materials that diverge from it may be seen as heresy and the teacher may be punished: by criticism from colleagues, by being ignored or even by losing his or her job.

Transgressions may be committed not only by refusing to submit to dominant values but also by infringing some copyright law. There are so many laws protecting so many potential resources available to teachers that it is almost impossible not to break any of them. Pictures, speeches, songs, videos, texts are all interesting resources for materials production, but most of them are protected by copyright and may not be used in practice. Using them without paying royalties may lead to severe punishment.

One possible way to revert this situation is to adopt the rules of the game, moving from the losing side to the winning side, by trying to produce materials and claim copyright for their production. Although this is practically impossible from an individual perspective (one person producing and selling teaching materials), it might be feasible if a collective approach is adopted (with division of labor); good quality material for

online learning typically involves three kinds of specialists: a language teacher, a graphic designer and a code programmer. Repositories for learning objects such as MERLOT and RIVED are a first step in this direction, not necessarily in terms of revenues, but in terms of recognition.

5. Challenges

The need for materials production becomes clear with the trend towards contextualization and the move from Communicative Language Teaching to Task-Based Language Teaching (Kumaravadivelu). Instead of consuming teaching materials produced by other people in other places, teachers can design their own materials for their own classes. The chances for meeting students' needs are greater, as are the challenges for the teachers. These challenges involve mainly the ability to move from bricolage to recyclage, the decision on how to exercise authorship and the need to work collaboratively.

The difference between production and reproduction may have a bearing on the recyclage versus bricolage dichotomy. Production relates to the idea of creation, viewing text as a message of the Author-God, in Barthes' terms (145), as if the universe, or parts of it, could be initiated over and over again. Reproduction is more humble: what authors do is a rearrangement of things that already exist in the universe. Teachers, as producers of teaching materials, may be placed along the continuum from production to reproduction. Authorship is a matter of degree; all other things being equal, authorship is probably more intense in recyclage than in bricolage. In recyclage, teachers should be aware of the horizons of expectations that students built around them, in the sense that teachers, as authors in their own right, are expected to add something on what they borrow from others; responsibility is higher. In terms of bricolage, responsibility is lower; after all, teachers do not own the pieces of paper they cut and paste from magazines to produce teaching material for their classes, as they do not own the websites they use as links for a WebQuest activity.

Language learning is an exercise in diversity, and students should be given chances for experiencing different worlds, which can be provided through bricolage as a centripetal force. But students should also be given

a place in the world, a locus from where they can integrate the diversity around them without getting lost; this is provided by recycle as a centrifugal force. The ability to strike a balance between the centripetal and centrifugal forces in materials production may one of the greatest challenges the language teacher has to face, considering things such as educational paradigms that may favor one approach to the exclusion of the other, contempt for practical solutions advanced by teachers, and even unreasonable privileges in copyright laws.

Foucault's original idea that authorship was both invented by society to punish the writer and by the writer to glean benefits from society, such as prestige or copyright royalties, could be revisited and targeted towards the idea of community. The romantic metaphor of writers as lonely wolves working by themselves in their dens is false; wolves are social animals that survive because they have developed a highly organized social system. Authorship needs to be seen in collective terms. The challenge, for teachers, is to get a good command of different tools that are now available for materials production (from authoring systems to podcasting software) and develop the ability to work in teams (set up common goals, implement division of labor, draw up rules, etc.). It might be interesting to consider that intelligence and creativity are distributed not only among the members of a community but also among the artifacts available in the community.

Barthes' idea of the death of the author could be revisited. Do teachers die when they produce teaching materials? If so, aren't they reborn when the materials come to life in students' hands? It is possible that the work of the teacher, originally restricted to the four walls of the classroom, not only expands to the world, reaching other students in other places, but also survives over time, producing a time-warp effect. The new technologies suggest that the teacher may be present not only in different places but also in different times.

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The Challenge of Autonomization

Walkyria Magno e Silva
Universidade Federal do Pará

Introduction

An experiment in futurology can give us an overview of the classroom our present students will face in a few years. This overview presents a continuum which goes from an ideal situation to a considerably less favorable environment for learning to happen. The positive side of the continuum would present a modern well equipped room filled with materials to work with, well prepared teachers and interested students. On the other hand, the other extreme would depict a hot crowded room with no resources, a teacher who would not really know what he is doing there and students whose minds are “a-wandering.” Some complex social and economic situations, which probably are causes of this last depiction, cannot be solved right away in the classrooms, although we all are aware that on the long term education is the only thing that can really make a difference in this scenario. However, as teachers’ teachers, we can do something in favor of the professional who will act as the conductor of the action in these contexts. How should we prepare our present students and future teachers to perform in any point of this continuum of teaching situations? The answer to this question is our challenge.

Future teachers certainly need technical preparation: language competence, metalinguistic competence, theoretical competence in EFL, and teaching practice competence. But besides these basic areas, we argue that since we cannot predict where and under which circumstances they will work, they also need to be given some kind of practice in action research and autonomy. These two concepts go hand in hand, once teachers

should foster autonomy, but they cannot do it if they are not autonomous themselves; action research is a proper way, in our opinion, to foster autonomy in the teaching field. Our role, as teachers' teachers is to provide opportunities for these two concepts to flourish, so, our students will all be able to search for better ways to exercise their job in the future and, by doing so, become more autonomous teachers.

1. Action research

Many authors have recently focused their attention on ways teachers can both develop themselves and find better ways to teach their classes (Nunan, Wallace, Edge, Moita Lopes, among others). Being able to identify a problem, to look for possible solutions in the theory, to design a plan incorporating theoretical input, to implement this plan, finally to evaluate its results, and maybe to publish them are part of the cycle of action research. Since contexts will be as varied as there are classrooms and teachers, more important than giving teachers-to-be recipes and ready made solutions will be to give them the instruments or the methodology to help them find their own answers.

Nunan, when discussing action research, quotes Kemmis and McTaggart and Cohen and Manion, and stresses the idea that this kind of research started to be given attention in EFL classrooms in the decade of the 80s of the last century. The first two quoted authors defined action research as research conducted by teachers working collaboratively that aimed to change something in their classes. Cohen and Manion also think that action research should be done collaboratively and its main goal must be to find a solution to a specific problem in a specific context.

At the same time that Nunan values what these authors state, he disagrees mainly in two points. The first one is that action research does not need to be necessarily collaborative. He argues that a sole teacher is able to conduct action research in his own classroom. The second point is that action research does not need to develop into a change in action; it can result in change, but it can also result in the conclusion that no change is necessary or liable to be implemented in the context where the action research has taken place. Nunan accepts the idea of an action research cycle as a descriptive case study of a particular classroom, group of learners, or

even a single learner if it is initiated by a question, is supported by data and interpretation, and is carried out by a practitioner investigating aspects of his or her own context and situation. He believes that if this is done, it will probably result in change, but not necessarily will so.

Wallace accepts the two possibilities of agency when he states that action research can be conducted by a teacher alone or it can be designed to accommodate collaborative action research with one or more colleagues. He also mentions the importance of focus in action research, that is, the need to concentrate on the solution of one problem at a time. When one problematic area is improved, the cycle can start again in a spiraling process. Finally, Wallace argues for the need of setting a time range for each phase in action research, so the process does not get lost and diluted in such a long time that focus is hard to be kept.

Edge discusses the paradox of the teacher researcher. He mentions the problem of research being too theoretical for a teacher and of classroom procedures being too practical for a theoretician. At this crossroad he sees the importance of building a community of teacher/researchers in order to solve the paradox, and thus, the importance of teachers conducting action research projects in their classrooms appears. He quotes authors, like Elliot, Kemmis and Taggart, Altricher et al., who all stress the change promoting characteristic of action research. It promotes changes not only in the way teachers teach their classes, but also in the way teachers *see*¹ their classes as *multi-possibility* environments. This is very clear in Clark's words when he mentions that "action research should contribute to the empowerment of individual teachers . . . our individual responsibility is not to attempt to impose large-scale change, but to act in our everyday exchanges with others in ways that instantiate the values that we value" (qtd. in Edge 5). Edge stresses, "The thinking teacher is no longer perceived as someone who applies theories, but as someone who theorizes practice . . . good teaching is right here, so long as we are working on developing it" (6). In this last quote, the change promoted by action research is clearly from the inside out, when teachers do not accept the role of applicationists, but rather assume the role of thinkers and developers of better ways to teach.

¹ Our emphasis.

Edge mentions that action research presupposes an attitude on the part of the teacher that privileges exploratory observation and participation with other teachers, thus creating a collegial atmosphere. All this will result in the empowering of self and others.

Distant from the realization of perfect finalized versions of research one might read in professional journals, we call teachers to try out action research, accepting the fact that, as Atkinson argues,

we do not have perfect theoretical and epistemological foundations; we do not have perfect methods for data collection; we do not have perfect or transparent modes of representation. We work in the knowledge of our limited resources. But we do not have to abandon the attempt to produce disciplined accounts of the world that are coherent, methodical, and sensible. (qtd. in Edge 11)

In Brazil, Moita Lopes was a precursor in spreading the word on action research. He believed, as many of us, that the dogmatic formation of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers designed by applied linguists in specialized centers was generally too far away from the teachers' reality. He stated that the EFL teacher should receive critical formation as well as a theoretical one in order to be able to decide what would work in his context and what would not. Theoretical knowledge, as ideas on the nature of language and the nature of language learning, is a fundamental part of a future teacher's capacity. However, as important as this is the critical capacity about the production of knowledge, which can be achieved if the proper questions are asked. A critical reflection about his or her own work frees the teacher from knowledge produced by others and empowers him or her to look for answers to questions posed by his or her own interests. Therefore, the need to familiarize future teachers with research methods should be mandatory in teacher preparation courses. Moita Lopes argues that the ideal mode for starting teachers in these methods is action research seen as

a type of investigation done by people in action in a certain social practice about this practice, in which results are continuously incorporated to the research process, becoming a new topic of investigation. This way, the researchers/teachers will always be acting in the production of knowledge about their own practice. (185)

The author mentions the importance of the existence of a consultant in the initiation process of the teacher in action research. Therefore, we state that there is no better occasion to start future teachers in this kind of research than during their college years, when they are preparing to be teachers and are under the supervision of their professors.

In his book, Moita Lopes also suggests several research instruments that can be used to conduct action research as well as gives some guidelines for conducting this type of research. He stresses the importance of auto-monitoring in all steps of action research in order to identify problem areas. He also states that results should be publicized in order to close the cycle of action research. This publicizing of work can be considered as a discussion in the teachers' room, a talk in a PTA² meeting, or a presentation in a conference of any size and importance. We believe that this public phase of action research can be done also to show other professionals that it is not impossible to produce one's own scientific work.

Our present students could be introduced to action research and guided in experiments using this model in order for them to become acquainted with its design. It would help them use it in the future. When producing their own research according to the action research model, they would also be paving their way into autonomy.

2. Autonomy

Autonomy is "a multidimensional capacity that will take different forms for different individuals, and even for the same individual in different contexts or at different times" (Benson 47). The classroom is a privileged context to provide autonomy experiences in order to empower students to follow their way independently beyond the classroom and according to their needs. The future teacher who goes through an autonomization experience will be more prone to pursue a career which will also worry about creating opportunities for his own students to be autonomous.

Benson proposes a model for the description of autonomy that entails three levels of control: over cognitive processes, over learning

² Parents and Teachers Association. In Brazil, the equivalent structure would be the *Conselho Escolar*.

management, and over learning contents. Control over cognitive processes involves reflection on how one learns better and implementation of actions that privilege these manners over others that are innocuous. This level of control can only be monitored through behaviors which are the outcomes of the cognitive processes; one can observe if one is really paying attention to something or if one is focusing on what should be studied. Control over learning management involves organizational skills on how to study. This level presupposes what should be learned first, when and where to study and other actions of the kind. Finally, control over learning content means that the learner goes beyond what is given to him in class and starts choosing what else he will learn. Benson states that all these three levels are interdependent and progress achieved in one level will support and enhance progress in others. However, it is not until all three levels have developed to a certain extent that autonomy is reached. Moreover, autonomy is not a state to be achieved, but a process which needs constant reworking in order to stay in activity. We have also argued elsewhere (Magno e Silva) in favor of the idea of an exponential understanding of autonomy, since we believe that each degree of autonomous behavior achieved will give way to several other possibilities of autonomy.

Several authors have shown interest in teachers' preparation to become autonomous (Aoki, Benson, Dam, Kohonen, among others). The autonomization of the teacher is a necessary condition for him to provide opportunities for his students to become more autonomous.

Aoki mentions that teachers must believe students can become autonomous. In her opinion, teachers should provide choices to students and negotiate important actions with them. Students' voices should be heard and taken into consideration to reflect on their learning process.

Benson stresses that the involvement of the teacher with his students is a crucial element in the implementation of autonomy practices in the classroom. Teachers should provide scaffolding for students to develop their autonomous behavior.

Dam also proposes a model for an autonomy enhancing teacher based on reflection. The author prepared a checklist for teachers who wish to evaluate their daily practice and see if they are promoting autonomous behavior in their classes. These classes can be divided in moments when the teacher is in command, moments when command is shared by teacher and students alike, and moments when the students are in command.

Kohonen proposes a collegial atmosphere in schools in order to provide a safe environment for teachers to develop their autonomous practice. This aspect corroborates the collaborative action research principles. A learning culture disseminated through colleagues demands administrative support which will be largely compensated by more motivated students.

In order for these experiences to happen, the teacher needs to share decision making procedures, delegate tasks, and even help learners take over the different levels of autonomous behavior. The challenges facing the autonomy enhancing teacher are enormous, once he/she needs to review his/her role in the classroom.

In a recent experience in one of our English Literature classes, we had to prepare something our students could do on their own during a class we could not be present. Based on the ideas of negotiation (Aoki) and leaving students in command (Dam), we gave them three choices of what to do when we were away. They could go together to the computer lab and research on the authors studied up to then in the course, they could go to the same lab and study one author we had not studied yet and present what they had found out to the classmates in a future class, or they could come to the class to prepare two posters about two of the authors we had already studied and put them up in the hall for all the other students to see.

The class discussed which activity they would be willing to do and decided for the last one. We, according to Aoki's prescriptions, believed our students could do a good job in making posters which would be both informational to students who would read them in the hall and indicative of what they had really learned about the authors studied.

Once the activity type was decided, we gave students the materials needed (scissors, glue, markers, and some big construction paper sheets) and told them they should negotiate how they would make the posters: as one whole group or divided in two smaller groups, each making the poster about one author. We also told them that they should decide on which information would appear in the posters, if they were to include pictures, if more research was needed or not, and all other aspects of the posters. We made them aware that all the discussions should be conducted in English, leaving Portuguese only as a last resource, if needed. Finally, we told them that presence to that class would be given to the names that appeared on the posters the next day we came to the university.

When we arrived in the university the following week, we saw two posters up in the hall: one on Charles Dickens and the other on Lewis Carrol. They had prepared the two posters together, the whole class being one group, so all their names were on both posters and we assigned presences to students who participated in the making of the posters. They decided to prepare similar posters to both authors, including pictures, a brief biography, most important works, and quotes of famous passages by both. The posters were well done and visually attractive, which we could easily confirm by the number of students we saw reading them in the following weeks they stayed up in the bulletin board.

More important than doing this specific task, what we feel our students learned was to make decisions, to take an active part in designing an activity and in choosing what they wanted to do. They assumed new roles that gave them an opportunity to exert control over content, management, and cognitive processes levels of learning with a high probability to expand it to other authors or to reading more of the authors they worked with. Besides, being a subject in an autonomy experiment like this one makes these students more prone to reproduce it in their future classes, mainly because we conducted a discussion about the process later on. For us, more important than the outcomes of the experiment was the fact that our students have experienced the action of choosing and have learned other ways to learn.

We are aware that managing autonomous classes requires from the teacher not only sound theoretical knowledge but also focused attention to planning of actions, nevertheless accepting negotiated and creative learning situations which happen in any teaching situation.

In some ways this experiment was also a small action research project. While asking ourselves how our students could use their class time to autonomously learn something when we would be away, we negotiated actions in a participative action research. The outcomes were very positive for both teacher and students.

3. Conclusion

Preparing teachers for a classroom in a future whose scenarios can be as varied as the ones mentioned in the beginning of this text is not a

simple task. We can rely, however, on the words of Gibran. When prompted to talk about a teacher, he said

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind. The astronomer may speak to you of his understanding of space, but he cannot give you his understanding. The musician may sing to you of the rhythm which is in all space, but he cannot give you the ear which arrests the rhythm nor the voice that echoes it. And he who is versed in the science of numbers can tell of the regions of weight and measure, but he cannot conduct you thither. For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man.

In Gibran's wise words we can identify the essence of autonomy because teachers cannot do things for their students, but they can show the way and serve as structures for learners to develop their own knowledge. By the same token, teachers can always develop their understanding of both classes and subject matter by conducting a spiraling sequence of action research mini-projects. The act of experimenting action research is in itself an act of autonomy, once it comprises individual theoretical study and search for materials. Eventually, the change caused by the cycle of action research will keep yielding new questions which, on their turn, will also be autonomously answered.

Elements like perception, persistence, humanization, knowledge access, preparation to face challenges, and autonomy, are basic tools for a future teacher ready to work in any situation.

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Foreign Languages Teaching, Education and the New Literacies Studies: Expanding Views

Walkyria Monte Mór
Universidade de São Paulo

1. Introduction

Recent research indicates that there has been a perception in the Elementary and Secondary schools that the teaching of foreign languages – mostly related to the English language – shows below-average outcome in its evaluation in what concerns effectiveness, or even level of satisfaction of teachers, students, students' parents and school directors, leading to the interpretation of its need for improvements and changes. This perception may also apply to the Letras programs in the universities. When pointing out what should be improved, the school teachers sometimes refer to methodological procedures; sometimes to inappropriate textbooks; sometimes to the lack of discipline of the students and their parents' participation in their education; sometimes to the teaching conditions provided by the schools, or by the government; sometimes to the inadequacy of the pedagogical orientations/parameters provided by the federal government and the State Secretaries of Education; sometimes to the insufficient and inappropriate teacher education given at the universities.

These indications possibly describe the concerns of other school teachers that have not participated in the focused investigation. These data have been analyzed generating interpretations that lead to reflections and a proposal of change in the focused teaching environments. Both the reflections and the proposal are fully presented in the *Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio: Línguas Estrangeiras-OCEM-LE* (2006) published by

the Ministry of Education (MEC), under the authorship of Menezes de Souza & Monte Mór. In this article, three of the theoretical conceptions that underpin the cited changes are expanded: the social changes observed in the last decades (Cope and Kalantzis) occurred as a consequence of technological advances that, by their turn, come to influence and reconstruct language and discourse, as well as social communication; the epistemological changes (Morin) that constitute the dialectics in the advances of language, technology and communication; the philosophy of education-pedagogy-practice dialectical relationship (Saviani) that comes together with the new literacies and multiliteracies theories, enabling the desired revision in the teaching of foreign languages, as identified by the mentioned research analysis. These three aspects constitute the focus of reasoning in this article.

2. Social and epistemological changes in the digital society

In the last decades, there have been undeniable social transformations. The social representations have visibly changed a mostly evident fact that can be noticed in written and electronic media. A comparison between advertisements of different decades would illustrate these differences with more clarity. For instance, the advertisings targeted to the female audience frequently represented women in the role of housewives; presently, women are represented in environments that associate them with other social participations, such as having public jobs. In the school photograph albums, one would often see well-behaved children, sat before the camera in two or three hierarchical rows, in trim uniforms, with well-combed hair, in a representation of school and social values of that age. In this same picture, the female school teacher –one would hardly see a male teacher, then – would tend to place herself in the upper row, signaling the inevitable superiority in the position of any teacher, who should be seen as knower, provider, and responsible for the control and discipline of the pupils. In a current photographic representation, some of these characteristics would not appear, reflecting the changes in the social relations, as well as in the teacher-student relationship, besides the way that teachers and students now deal with knowledge, communication and language.

As for these changes, Cope and Kalantzis perceive them in an intricate way in the working, public and personal lives of citizens. With

reference to working lives, these authors highlight that the era of fast capitalism or post-Fordism, both terms imbued with the neoliberal ideologies, praised the replacement of repetitive and underskilled work standards for another pattern that requires multiskilled workers, workers who show diversified experiences and flexibility, able to work in an environment in which flat hierarchy practices have substituted for the well-known vertical hierarchy. In public lives, the authors observe obsolescence in the concept of what 'civic' means. In their view, the term 'civic', that explains what is connected or related with the city, has been disseminated within a monolithic and monocultural perspective of what should be understood as 'national.' In this perspective, standardized values undermine dialect differences, for instance. In the words of the authors: "The expanding, interventionary states of the nineteenth and twenty centuries used schooling as a way of standardizing national languages. In the Old World this meant imposing national standards over dialect differences. In the New World, it meant assimilating immigrant and indigenous peoples to the standardized 'proper' language of the colonizer" (14). To extend their agreement, I suggest that the current representation of what is civic becomes perceptible in the popular participation in public events or celebrations with which the people find closer identification, and for this reason, widely express their support. To exemplify, nowadays the civic parade to celebrate Brazilian Independence Day on September 7th – through which spectators traditionally learned to value or reinforce values such as discipline, uniformity, national symbols – attracts fewer participants, according to media registers, than in other decades. Nevertheless, the Gay Parade – through which the audience learns about or integrates with diversities, an issue that really matters to them – has enjoyed growing popularity. As for personal lives, Cope and Kalantzis observe that the threshold between the public and the private has gradually turned thinner, considering "the increasing invasion of private spaces by mass media culture, global commodity culture, and communication and information networks." This invasion results in "culture narratives that are built up of interwoven narratives and commodities that cross television, toys, fast-food packaging, video games," and so on, as the authors assert (16), interfering in and reconstructing beliefs and life courses.

The depictions of changing societies presented by the authors promote reflection chiefly if contrasted with what is portrayed as representative of a network society, as Castells defines the society that transforms itself

with the presence of new technologies, new language and communication modes, and new interactions. In this society, the work world is interested in a productive diversity, requiring that workers be empowered, critical, creative, innovative, because certain jobs certainly require decision making, initiative, and choice making. However, Cope and Kalantzis would again advert that “these new workplace discourses can be taken in two different ways – as opening new educational and social possibilities, or as new systems of mind control or exploitation” (12), leaving a challenging question for reflection: “how do we transform incrementally the achievable and apt outcomes of schooling?” (19). In the city living, according to these same authors, the civic sense imbued with the old and traditional patterns and standards of national values does not correspond to the perceptions of citizens in their communities. The civic sense has expanded to become a plural notion, incorporating global and local values, as well as the hybrid of the transcultural discourses, legitimating new civic spaces and new notions of citizenship. In relation to the civic, work and personal lives in the new societies, “the homogeneous imagined community of modern democratic nation states” (16) describes more of a desired society than of a real one. An attentive look would surely perceive the multilayered and diversified identities in the multilayered social communities.

In a dialectic process, it is known that the transformations occur on a two-way basis, thus making the transformer be the transformed as well. In this way, the relationships between subject-object, sender-receiver, knower-non-knower, technology-society have merged. On this two-way basis, it becomes difficult, and perhaps somewhat irrelevant, to identify what the starting point of the transformation is. It would sound like an innocuous search, according to certain authors, such as Simon (*apud* Monte Mor), to whom understanding why certain people are included in or excluded from certain communities, social activities and participation may lead to more transforming action than just searching for the origin, the very start of an action, without contemplating the process of social inclusion and exclusion.

An additional aspect in relation to the focused changes themselves would be the understanding that they are not only social but also epistemological. It is known that the mentioned old advertisements – that used the image of housewives to represent the social function of women in society, as well as photographs of school groups, where one would see

disciplined students and teachers that showed control in their milieu – were products of a certain production of knowledge, or of a knowledge built within the fundamentals of conventional epistemologies, as it is described by Morin. This author criticizes this epistemology saying that it promotes reproductive education, instead of the development of a creative mind through the pedagogical action. He explains that conventional epistemology concentrates on constructing knowledge according to the principles of *reduction* – knowledge is reduced or fragmented from the whole to the parts – and *grading* – learning is designed in a pre-established scale of complexity that starts from an easy bottom line that gradually advances to more complex levels of difficulty of the subject to be apprehended by students. In the teaching of foreign languages, for example, the principle of reduction is seen in the planning of grammatical units through books and classes; grading is observed in the starting lessons and sequencing of what should be taught. Very frequently, the verb To Be is the starting lesson, followed by the Present Continuous Tense (...ing), the Simple Present Tense (do/does), Future with ‘going to’, Simple Past Tense (did; regular and irregular verbs) and so on.

Morin’s reasoning is corroborated by the studies developed by Lankshear and Knobel towards what is identified as digital epistemology. These researchers show that the new languages and technologies in the digital society introduce another way of knowledge construction. They also name it as “performance epistemology” and explain it as “knowing how to proceed in the absence of existing models and exemplars” (173). They verify that this way of building knowledge is highly stimulated in the user’s interaction with the Internet and in the interactions with the new languages, new language modalities and new technologies to which, in the absence of specific knowledge to a required interaction, the user needs to create his/her own knowing. The authors call attention to the ‘emerging practices’ in these interactions, such as the case of “bricolage” (a practice of assemblage of elements), “collage” (a practice of transferring materials or knowledge from one context to another) and “montage” (a practice of disseminating borrowings in a new setting) (173). They represent mental processes that require more capacity for creation, and not only of reproducing models as in conventional epistemologies. In face of the digital epistemology practices, the teaching in elementary and secondary schools, as well as in

universities, should be subjected to either reflection or revision, or both, in a way that meets the expectations of the new societies and its needs.

3. The changes in teaching and education

As already explained, society has been transforming languages, communication modalities, ways of communication, of interaction, of knowledge constructing at the same time that it is dialectically transformed by these new languages, new communication modalities, ways of communicating, of interaction, of knowledge constructing. The search for knowledge uniformity and for a standard guidance in teaching should thus succumb to a diversity of pedagogical and curricular possibilities which appear to be more congruent with the described changes. It is noticed that in this process the predominance and dominance of methodologies have become less important than the necessity to reexamine practices, with the support of pedagogies and philosophies of education.

Still referring to the changes in society, it is noticed that, besides the school pedagogies, there is another pedagogy that is rather effective in the out-of-school living and experiences. It is the one denominated by Giroux as public pedagogy. Giroux makes use of this term to describe a cultural policy that is present in society within, for instance, television programs, series, advertisings, choice of pictures in news building.¹ Among

¹ Subjecting such public pronouncements to critical inquiry can only emerge within those pedagogical sites and practices in which matters of critique and a culture of questioning are requisite to a vibrant and functioning democracy. Public pedagogy not only defines the cultural objects of interpretation, it also offers the possibility for engaging modes of literacy that are not just about competency but also about the possibility of interpretation as an intervention in the world. While it is true that as Arthur C. Danto insists that images such as those associated with Abu Graib “tell us something worth knowing about where we are as culture,” meaning does not rest with the images alone, but with the ways in which such images are aligned and shaped by larger institutional and cultural discourses and how they call into play the condemnation of torture (or its celebration), how it came out, and what it means to prevent it from happening again. This is not merely a political issue but also a pedagogical one (Giroux 231-32).

various examples, he refers to the photographs of a prison in Abu Ghraib, globally divulged in 2004, showing the instances of abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners; the TV series *Survivor*; and TV programs such as *The Apprentice*. These would be some examples of media whose power dynamics is imbued with educative strength, and in this case, constituting a public pedagogy. As for the prisoners' pictures, the author understands that they have gained "their status as a form of public pedagogy by virtue of the spaces they create between the sites in which they become public and the forms of pedagogical address that both frame and mediate their meaning" (231). Their diffusion (talk radio, computer screens, television, newspaper, the Internet, and alternative media) has counted on no sociopolitical and ethical concern, considering that although the photographic registers are implicated in history, their conditions of production have been suppressed making them invisible to the viewers. Moreover, as stated by the author, "often framed within dominant forms of circulation and meaning, such images generally work to legitimate particular forms of recognition and meaning marked by disturbing forms of diversion and evasion" (231). Therefore, these photographs have generated, at the same time, critical questioning in relation to abusive acts and teachings about power, punishment and submission, allowing the doubt that the abusive acts may reflect the attitude of a few "bad apples" who may eventually have gone beyond the limits, as Giroux asserts in an ironic tone. As for the TV series and programs, this author believes that they convey an underlying teaching that humiliation is the beginning step for one's way to success or fame. He adds that the rituals in these programs "condense pain, humiliation, and abuse into digestible spectacles of violence or serve up an endless celebration of retrograde competitiveness, the compulsion to 'go it alone', the ideology of hardness (term by Adorno *apud* Giroux) and power over others as the central features of masculinity" (239). He concludes that this incitation to hyper-masculinity includes an exaggerated competitiveness that gives "violence a glamorous and fascist edge" (239).

The author's reference, besides evidencing the teachings that occur out of the classrooms, certainly put conventional school pedagogies at debate. If on the one hand public pedagogy shows a pernicious face to a society that matured within the conventional literacy which does not emphasize critique, as do the new literacies and multiliteracies of the

present network society, on the other hand it also offers reflection about its other characteristics which turn them attractive, interesting and effective. This perception, thus, requires more studies, investigation and expansion. What seems to be at stake is the need to define a new process of education. The current moment reveals a binary dispute between reproduction – which enables control, measuring, the identification of who learns more, or less, in the teaching-learning process – and creation, creativity and critique.

In this sense, it is observed that there has been much debate about what is done in classroom practices, contrasting with what is idealized for this same practice. Most of such concerns focuses on the practice, as if it existed isolated from pedagogy and philosophy. However, the concentration on classroom practices reinforces technicist values in which the technique-methodology competence of teachers gains centrality and becomes the indication of pedagogical efficacy and effectiveness. In an analysis of this view of practice, Saviani defends the necessity of apprehending the dialectics within the philosophy of education-pedagogy-practice relationship. According to him, the practice that focuses on itself veils an educational theory and politics that seem to be neutral. However, the apparently neutral practice ideologically acts in favor of an education in which the teachers are seen as the knowledge porters or depositors, those who know how to explain contents and inherited reality values, notwithstanding stimulating value reasoning and critique by their own students, and many times, not even by themselves. This conception of education would be, then, the one that values clarity in the explanation, and a methodology that eases this objective, influencing the teachers' pedagogical activities only superficially. The superficiality, in this case, would be due to the fact that this concern does not encompass the conceptions of societies, nor of people/citizens that should be developed for these societies, or even the social thoughts and views that should be brought to classrooms. In sum, a technique-oriented practice by itself lacks a critical approach that is often repressed by its reproductivist aims.

The reasoning exposed by Saviani, if metaphorically alluded to the image of a tree, would compare the didactic-pedagogical concerns to what has more visibility in the tree. That is, classroom practice (that requires interrogating which practices, approaches should contribute to the education

of individuals X or Y, or Z, societies X, or Y, or Z) would correspond to the tree top; its leaves can be seen from a distance. Nevertheless, it should be observed that these leaves are supported by a trunk, corresponding to a pedagogy (that enables interrogating which conceptions, thoughts, orientations are embedded in the education of individuals X or Y, or Z, societies X, or Y, or Z) that, by its turn, is nurtured by roots, representative of its philosophy of education (that enables interrogating which education should be promoted, to which individuals, to which societies). It should also be realized that this tree interacts with an environment, as well as practice, pedagogy and philosophy of education interact with a social, historical and cultural context. The dialectics in this metaphorical reasoning may contribute to a reviewing of what is practiced in classrooms, by enabling interrogations in relation to which perspectives, thoughts, people, societies are developed by certain practices that are chosen in teacher education, or when certain teaching methodologies are prioritized. This reflection may, as well, reinvigorate or explain certain assertions about what should be reviewed.

4. New literacies and the teaching of foreign languages

Under the denominations of new literacies and multiliteracies, these studies have emerged from the observation that in spite of the literacy practiced in various countries that has gradually lowered illiteracy rates and reached better results in the last decades, a great part of the literate shows characteristics of what is, then, identified as 'functional illiterate' (Luke and Freebody). These would be the literate whose reading ability is limited to literal comprehension of a text, representing a time in which literacy would mean the teaching of reading and writing, as it is also explained by Soares: being literate would mean "the state or condition of one who reads and writes" (20). This author thus adds that the technological society has greatly contributed to the change of meaning of 'reading' and 'access to reading.' If the literate was the one able to read a simple note or message or to write one's own name, nowadays it is the individual who is able to use reading and writing within a social practice. This observation comes from assessments done in various countries of several continents. The outcomes conclude that a great part of the investigated readers shows

difficulties in the comprehension of a text and in the synthesis of its content. Even more difficulties are observed in the readers' capacity of inference, perception of ironies, interpretation of the between-the-lines message; besides, they lack their own critique of what they read and find it hard to relate the content of a text with the social context or reality in which they live. These perceptions become, then, some of the reasons for the renovated studies on this matter. Acknowledging that the social changes demand the inclusion of various abilities in how literacy works, various researchers have been developing studies in the new literacies area, aiming at enhancing visual literacy, digital literacy, multicultural literacy and critical literacy (Cervetti, Pardales and Damico), among others.

In this new conception of literacy, Luke and Freebody state that within the understanding of what reading means, the teaching of reading should accompany the teaching of cultural modes of seeing, describing, explaining. According to these authors, the readers should be required to understand textual representations, values, ideologies, discourses, take positioning, have views of the world, in addition to understanding that reading is related with knowledge and power distribution in a society. Within such educational parameters, it is expected that the interdisciplinarity in the areas of Literature and Languages, for instance, aims at reaching the objectives of reading as a social practice, as it is defended in these new studies.

Noticeably, thus, the proposal focused on here shows pedagogical-philosophical concerns, as it turns to a critical perception of the societies in which we all live, to the development of people who interact in these societies having more capacity of choices and decision making. Therefore, it is possible to conclude, first of all, that the teaching of foreign languages that integrates elementary, secondary and university education should not be seen as merely instrumental, it must be seen as part of a larger educational commitment, if it is assumed that foreign language studies may contribute to education.

In this way, the focus of concern in the teaching of foreign languages that used to lead to classroom practices and issues – referring to old-fashioned methodological procedures; inappropriate textbooks; the lack of discipline of the students and their parents' participation in their education; the teaching conditions provided by the schools, or by the

government; and various other aspects – should expand the angle of perspective, exercising the dialectic look as suggested by Saviani. It should, then, look further than the leaves of the tree, as in the metaphor previously mentioned, having in mind that this exercise would not disregard or erase the relevance of what has frequently been indicated or listed as ‘classroom problems’ by teachers and students.

According to the new literacies concept, the teaching of foreign languages would not be excluded from the educational process; it should surely be revisited. This reviewing should include the redefinition of the objectives in this teaching that should expand from the linguistic and instrumental focus to the educational one; the redefinition of the meaning of citizenship to be adopted in the schools and universities, thinking of the development of citizens that live in changing societies that, by their turn, are entrenched in plural perspectives in relation to what is ‘civic,’ and not in a traditional pattern that has predominated during long decades; the adoption of a concept of language and culture that is local as well, and not only globalized and universalizing; the expansion of cultural concepts that foster plurality and diversity.

In this sense, Gee (*Situated Language*) adverts that the conventional contents – limited to facts and principles of a certain knowledge domain – represent barriers in the implementation of a new educational perspective. In foreign languages, these conventional contents would be recognized in the concentration on language materiality, that is, in the limitations of a pedagogical proposal that would contemplate only the knowledge about the language, the information, the linguistic aspects, even knowing that one of the reasons for this choice is the fact that language materiality provides measurable evaluation of the students’ learning. The author emphasizes that the abilities become the content of teaching in a society that practices new epistemologies. This premise is reinforced by the theories by Lankshear and Knobel when they explain about performance epistemology that turns to promote the importance of “knowing how to proceed in the absence of existing models and exemplars” (173).

These considerations set the challenge of a foreign languages teaching that is not ‘ready to use,’ but that can count on much experience about what should be reconstructed, as it is said in the *Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio: Línguas Estrangeiras-OCEM-LE* (2006). The students

will certainly continue to study foreign languages, however, according to perspectives that may approach what they learn with their social living. This may be an alternative to deconstruct the belief that foreign languages as disciplines are misplaced in the school curriculum; and to construct a plan to enable the school to accomplish a meaningful proposal of such teaching.

5. Final considerations

The issues approached in this text possibly do not reflect only the teaching of foreign languages, considering that they refer to an educational practice of a historic, social and cultural moment.

The exposition about social and epistemological changes as well as the new conceptions of language and education intends to explain the reasons for the widely defended need for the foreign languages teaching reviewing. It should be noted, though, that this 'renovated way of doing' requires much learning and maturing while it is implemented. It represents a knowledge that has been constructed and reconstructed and that possibly nurtures and renews the tree leaves at which teachers have been taught to look, or the practices in which they search for more satisfaction.

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PART 2

New Challenges in Literature

Transnational Cinema: Representations of Latin American Geopolitical Struggles in Contemporary Anglo-American Films

Anelise Reich Corseuil

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

The process of transnationalization of economies, cultures, and societies has affected film production in different ways and has posed new challenges in our ways of understanding the relationship between national and transnational film production. From a Brazilian perspective, transnational cinema can be seen from aesthetic, economic and political terms in which the discussion around national and international elements in recent films like *City of God*, the *Motorcycle Diaries* and *Central Station* can be associated with the dismantling of the national cultures and identities within a globalized world that obeys the laws of the market economy rather than those of national States.¹ Although these films present a conjunction of factors defined by local elements, such as *mise-en-scène*, social themes and characters that are identified as national or regional, they also present a narrative close to that of an international cinema that tends to follow the conventions of the classic, logical and linear Hollywood narrative, thus offering little resistance to readings by different audiences, independently

¹ For a discussion of the interrelationship between national and international in cinema see Andrew Higison's "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema". In *Cinema & Nation*. Eds. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie. London: Routledge, 2002. p.63-74.

of the nationality of this or that group of spectators². The globalization or transnationalization of cinema can also be thought of as a two-way street as we observe that the national allegory, as a political narrative form historically associated with third world countries, or parody, so commonly associated with postmodern cinema, are not privileged forms of this or that national cinema, but transit freely in contemporary productions. I mention here, as examples, two postmodern films that utilize pastiche and allegory to weave together a sharp critique of the course of national and international politics: Carla Camurati's *Carlota Joaquina*, which criticizes colonial Brazil from a contemporary perspective, and Alex Cox's *Walker*, which allegorizes the power relationships between the USA and Nicaragua up to the present day³. In this case, it can be argued that the transnationalization of aesthetic and narrative categories does not imply, necessarily, an emptying of the national and political content of contemporary cultural productions.

Transnationalization can also be defined in economic terms, as, since the mid 80s there has been a rash of major cross-media mergers such as "Disney and ABC Capital Cities; Turner and Time-Warner; Westinghouse and CBS; and Sony and Columbia", with "operations and distribution spanning every continent and nearly every technology"⁴ (Hess and Zimmerman 1). Documentaries and historical fictional films, which are also part of international co-productions, can be seen as forms capable of criticizing hegemonic power relations involving different countries and the unequal forces that contend within the fluidity of transnational

² Fredric Jameson discusses the question of the national and the global in post-modern cinema in *Espaço e Imagem: teorias do pós-moderno e outros ensaios de Fredric Jameson*. 3.ed. Org. and Trans. Ana Lucia Almeida Gazzola. Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2004. See also Ivana Bentes for a discussion of the Aesthetization of Hunger in "Da Estética à Cosmética da Fome". *Jornal do Brasil*, 08/07/2001.

³ For an analysis of these two films see Anelise R. Corseuil, "Estudos Culturais e a hibridização da paródia e do alegórico no filme histórico contemporâneo: confrontos e transbordamentos." In *Palco, Página e Tela*. Anelise R. Corseuil and John Caughie, orgs. Florianópolis: Insular, 2000.

⁴ See Hamid Naficy for a discussion of transnationalization and "accented cinema", p.126.

capital. This paper analyses, as cases in point, *A Place Called Chiapas*, a Canadian documentary, released in 1998, and two historical fictional films, *Salvador* (1986), directed by Oliver Stone, and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), films produced with funds and subsidies from a variety of sources: governmental and private, national and international. Besides employing people from various nationalities, the transnational process of production and distribution of these films illustrate the difficulties in separating national and international processes of film production nowadays. Beyond the issue of film production, as Robert Stam points out, “if the nationalist discourse of the 1960s drew sharp lines between First and Third World, oppressor and oppressed, post-nationalist discourse replaces such binarisms with a more nuanced spectrum of subtle differentiations, in a new global regime where First and Third world are mutually imbricated” (Stam 32). *A Place Called Chiapas*, directed by Nettie Wild, involved subsidies from CBC, NFB, Téléfilm Canada, Canada Wild Production, among other companies; *Salvador* was produced by Hemdale Film Corporation and was distributed by 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Polygram video, MGM/UA among others; and *The Motorcycle Diaries*, co-produced by Robert Redford, includes the following production companies: Film Four, South Fork Pictures, Tu Vais Voir, Inca Films S.A. among other international partners. In spite of the internationalism associated with the processes of production and distribution of these films, which could indicate a certain effacing of the specificity of local elements of Latin American histories and political struggles that the films represent, I argue that these films reinscribe Latin American geopolitical struggles within a transnational context. As the films offer a critique of the role played by international media networks in their representation of political struggles in Latin America, as they reveal the unequal relation of power among the nations involved in these conflicts, and the flow of transnational capital in its crossing of national borders, the audience is capable of perceiving the inclusion of the local within a broader political map. The aesthetics used in these films tend to oscillate between an international classic style and a more parodic, fragmented, metalinguistic language that reveals the various places from which these films speak: North America and Europe, and their perspective on Latin America. In what follows I will discuss the importance of political films in a transnational scenario of film production.

The term defined by Alison Landsbergh as *prosthetic memory*, used to describe how popular memory can be shaped by mass technologies that allow the spectator to incorporate as individual experience non-experienced historical events (quoted in Burgoyne, 105)⁵, aptly summarizes the influence that icons and images can exert in the collective imaginary. Within this context, various film practices come into play—not only the Hollywood blockbuster but also political films and other alternative film incorporating their own alternative practices, which fit Hamid Naficy’s definition of “accented cinema”, for a cinema of exiled, diasporic and emergent modes of film making, as an alternative to dominant forms of narrative. According to Naficy, alternative cinema is produced in the “interstitial spaces” of society and mainstream film industry. Even though this alternative cinema is not strongly motivated by money, it “is nevertheless enabled by capital—in a peculiar mixed economy consisting of market forces within media industries; personal, private, public, and philanthropic funding sources; and ethnic and exilic economies. As a result, the alternatives are never entirely free from capital, nor should they be reduced to it” (Naficy 132-33). At the same time that documentaries and political films are not part of major Hollywood transnational companies, neither are they completely outside the market. They can be measured against blockbusters, as differentiated spaces that offer a very rich texture from which we can understand “otherness”. In these films Latin American geopolitical struggles are located within a broader perspective, since politics, class struggle and the relationship between the State and the media are seen as evolving within an international perspective. The films analysed in this paper represent a Latin America composed, predominantly, of a population of indigenous peoples displaced from the centre of power, as much in relation to Latin America itself, as in relation to Europe and the USA. *The Motorcycle Diaries*, *Salvador* and *A Place Called Chiapas* are not only representations of political, social and historical issues related to Latin America but they also allow a reflection on the uses of language and discourses that historically have been used to define Latin America—colonialist, liberalist and democratic discourses.

⁵ Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

A Place Called Chiapas

This film, awarded the prize for best documentary produced in Canada in 1998, and the recipient of the Genie Award in 1999, presents the uprising of the “Zapatist” Army for National Liberation, led by the sub-commander Marcos, against and the president of Mexico, Zedillo. The conflict happens in consequence of the implantation of NAFTA (the North America Free Trade Agreement) in Mexico, in 1994. The narrative in off explains that NAFTA facilitated the suppression, on the part of the Mexican government, of the Mayan Indians’ settlement in small subsistence farms, as well as favoring the boycott of the corn production by Mayan Indians, since the corn consumed in Mexico was being imported from the U.S. at a price inferior to that of corn produced by the Indians. Members of the Catholic Church tried to mediate the conflict as the Indian population, whose members are interviewed in the film, were victimized by the action of paramilitary groups, *zapatistas* and landowners. The documentary can be qualified as “politically correct” in its attempt to present to different audiences an external gaze at the Chiapas conflict. Nettie Wild positions herself as a foreigner who presents the political problem in Chiapas from a personal perspective. In the initial sequence, her narrative in off draws a political panorama of Chiapas, offering a particular reading of it by her as a Canadian. The subsequent scenes depict Nettie’s group trying to penetrate into the Chiapas territory. Nettie is then seen in middle plane, inside her pick-up truck, arguing with the guards about the need to show them a passport, since she is already on Mexican territory, where there should not be frontiers. The film raises a question about Chiapas—“What place is this?”—to later answer it with a sequence of images where a map of Mexico presents some spots in red, small Chiapas villages that, according to the narrative in off, are “frontiers within frontiers,” determining internal differences in the Mexican territory itself. That is, the purpose of the documentary is to represent these internal differences in Mexico, instead of homogenizing the diverse ethnicities and interests.

The sequence in voice-off, explaining on the map the trajectory of Nettie Wild’s group, continues to inform viewers that from the small village of La Realidad there are no more roads. The subtext of the visit suggests a problem of representation since the place cannot be represented in terms of cartography, thus bringing to memory the various migration

currents of cartographers that came to the Americas during the 18th and 19th centuries. The absence of roads to represent the Chiapas space can be understood as a parodic reading of colonialist-historical texts and explorers' travel writings. Authors like Humboldt, for example, "reinvented" South America's nature in a dramatic and grandiose tone, converting what was already common knowledge among the local inhabitants into European knowledge, national and continental (Pratt 120). Various other sequences in the film reiterate the documentarist's conscious posture regarding the process of representation in hegemonic discourses that attribute to themselves a certain authority to speak of a specific and distinct historical reality. In the sequence in which Nettie begins her interview with commander Marcos, the audience is allowed to listen to Nettie's questions, while framing Marcos, and keeping Nettie off-screen. The inversion of the roles of interviewed and interviewer, is revealed when Marcos asks how long she has been in Chiapas. He then comments that eight months is a very short time to understand Chiapas, explaining soon after that he has been there for twelve years and "only now . . . is starting to understand the place better." We can read the inversion of roles as a way of inverting the positions of interviewed and interviewer, revealing once more that Nettie democratically accepts Marcos's criticism as it places her in the position of an external observer whose understanding of Chiapas is rather restricted, a position that undermines the very authority of an "author" of documentaries.

Salvador

Similarly to *A Place Called Chiapas*, Oliver Stone's *Salvador* presents a critical perspective of its own discourse as it questions the journalistic coverage of the Civil war in El Salvador between 1980 and 1981—the murder of Archbishop Romero, the ambush and the brutal death of various women missionaries, and Reagan's reelection. In this chaos, Boyle, a cold and detached journalist who, for anything better being offered, ends up covering the Salvadorian war, falls in love with Maria (Elpedia Carrillo) and takes a more ethical stand about the North-American interference in the conflict. The film goes beyond the romance between Maria and Boyle to place him as an eye-witness to various historical atrocities committed in El Salvador, the manicheism of the political discourse preached by

Reagan, and the manipulations by the media. The film presents the political events in El Salvador as a consequence of the North-American interference in the war, illustrated by the presence of the CIA officials and the North-American army in El Salvador, and by Reagan's reports on television during the development of the civil war. In this context, Boyle's inability to understand the reality of terror implanted in El Salvador transforms him into an allegory of the rupture between North-American popular and democratic ideals and the military practice of oppression sustained or justified by the democratic ideals themselves. Amid political discourses, half truths and historical atrocities, Boyle stands between the violence of the war and the democratic discourse preached by Reagan.

In this way, at the same time Stone uses a realist narrative associated with Latin America, especially with background poverty, such as the garbage dump where the bodies of political prisoners are cast off, he also problematizes the construction of the real in war journalism. By juxtaposing the realism of photography and the meta-narrative provided by montage, the film duplicates on an aesthetic level the problematization of the connection between the North-American military force and the liberal discourse of Reagan.

Salvador problematizes the relation between the U.S. and El Salvador by revealing the coexistence of the various discourses that permeate the film. Not even Boyle could save El Salvador or Maria. His laconic return to the U.S. reveals the impotence of old discourses and forms of representation imposed on the reality of an "other" who cannot be shaped easily and demands a redimensioning of places, positions, perspectives and forms of representation.

The Motorcycle Diaries

The Motorcycle Diaries can be divided into two major parts, before and after young Guevara's involvement with social and political struggles, the dividing point being his encounter with a couple of miners in the copper mines of Chile. As in a rite of passage, once Guevara, not yet "Che" Guevara, is exposed to the exploitation of the copper miners and the silencing of the communists in Chile, the film narrative loses its focus on the young bourgeois medical student, whose fortune could have been

enlarged had he married his promised fiancée, to engage itself on Guevara's growing awareness of the process of exclusion and oppression imposed on the indigenous Latin American population.

Parallel to the process of sentimentalization and linearity of the narrative, very close to Hollywood classic standards, there are elements in the film that allow a certain distancing between the audience and the story lived by Guevara. Such elements are presented in more panoramic shots in which the camera distances itself from the motorcycle, from a low angle and with an objective point of view, to reveal the landscapes from the Pampas to the Andes. In the credits sequence there is also a number of cuts that show shots in black and white of the characters that appeared during the film. In this sequence the process of the construction of the narrative becomes more visible as the medium-length and close-up shots of the characters that participated in the film, as a kind of portraiture in black and white, repositions them in a universe that is more real and more documentary-like. It is as if the film, about to end, makes a kind of permanency possible for these people/characters, not as nostalgic elements in black and white photos, but as elements that move independently of the constructed narrative and that are therefore real. In these sequences there exists an opening up of the filmic text that redefines the role of the audience as possible interpreters and conductors of the narrative.

The films analysed here propose, at the same time, a local and a transnational reading of social struggles. For audiences, independently of their nationality, social class, and political engagements, are able to transcend their space toward an understanding of other subjects and other cultures that are inextricably linked to each other within a world in which genres, cultural frontiers and political borders are constantly being blurred. In this sense, Guevara (played by Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal) could be read as the ideal audience, the one capable of transcending his own self. In the same way that Walter Salles transcends Brazil as he looks at Latin America, perhaps one of the first Brazilian directors to make a movie about Latin America. In similar ways, Rick Boyle is also reformulating his vision of the world, as Nettie Wild redraws her perspective of the virtual and real relations between North America and Mexico. From the physical map of Latin America, we, the audiences, go through a process of interculturality, being transformed by these different journeys (from Canada to Chiapas;

from the US to El Salvador and from Argentina to Venezuela), displaced from our own place of origin for the understanding of another political and social I.

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Red Criticism

Eloína Prati dos Santos

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

...I've chosen *Red matters* because red has not mattered much as yet, not in the aura of the postcolonial, gender and race, borderlands, cultural, or subaltern studies. Although there exists at present a solid body of criticism demonstrating the importance of Native American literature in its own right and in relation to ethnic, minority, or difference literature of a variety of kinds, Native materials still continue to be badly neglected.

(Arnold Krupat, *Red Matters*, 2002)

Although we are in dire need of examination of new ways to engage in the discipline rather the unquestioned acceptance of what we have inherited under the rubric Native studies, we have nevertheless been passed down an important intellectual tradition built not only in the last thirty years or so, in terms of the rise of Native studies programs in universities, but on past generations of Native writers and thinkers.

Craig Womack (*Red on Red*, 1999)

The title I chose – Red Criticism – prompted me to choose the two epigraphs above. Red has been a word used by several Native writers because it avoids the white misnomer, Indian, and at the same time carries the mark of radical resistance to Euro-American accounts of Native representation. Red, one of the three primary colors, is related to passion, anger, shame, violence, danger and blood, and known to increase heart beats, so it is an apt metaphor for the discussion of Native literature, that has been referred to, occasionally, as Red Literature, and its main themes.

The aim of this essay is to map the amplitude of “critical strategies” (a term Womack uses) informing the reading of Native American literature by Native American scholars. Because it is only in the last decade or so that this criticism has started to produce indispensable bibliography for those interested in the subject and because the first attempt I came across, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, published by Elvira Pulitano in 2003, includes commentaries that seem, at times, too anxious to reinstate an Euro-American upper hand in the debate. One term that strikes me that way is, for example, “tribocentric” to refer to Womack, Warrior and Cook-Lynn’s arguments that actually talk about maintaining a tribal affiliation as an identity stronghold closely related to sovereignty issues. But I do not want to introduce many Euro-American voices in this presentation¹, for I believe that Native critics have a lot to say for their art that is worthy of our attention.

It is only a natural follow up to more than thirty years of consistent textual production called Native Literary Renaissance that a body of criticism starts to come up as well, written by indigenous critics about indigenous writing, as varied as the indigenous experience on the continent, as Craig Womack tells us:

Just as there are a number of realities that constitute Indian identity – rez², urban, full-blood, language speakers, gay, straight, and many other possibilities – there are also a number of legitimate approaches to analyzing Native literary production (2).

The first recognized attempt was made by Choctaw-Cherokee Irish descendant Louis Owens, in *Other Destinies*, in 1992. Owens examines the question of identity up close in the work of the best known Native

¹ I hope two of Arnold Krupat’s recent texts on the subject come out during 2008, for we have been exchanging notes on Native criticism and he presents a deeply analytical and more comprehensive view of the theme at hand: “Culturalism and Its Discontents: Native American Literary Criticism Today,” presented on July 12 in Mainz, Germany, and “Culturalism and Its Discontents: an Essay Review of David Treuer’s *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual*,” to be published by JAST (Journal of American Studies in Turkey).

² Short for “reservation,” a term widely used by Natives.

authors since Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize in 1968: Mourning Dove, D'Arcy McNickle, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, Gerald Vizenor. From within his place in the USian academy, and fluent in the western theoretical discourse of postmodernism and postcolonialism, Owens recognizes that "The recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community, becomes in the face of such obstacles a truly enormous undertaking" at the center of American Indian fiction (5). The obstacles he refers to are the "inventions" (called "simulations" by Vizenor) of the American Indian in public consciousness and the notion that this figure has long vanished and been replaced by the actual Native and his contemporary experience. "It is at this disjuncture between myth and reality that American Indian novelists most often take aim, and out of which the material of their art most often arises," Owens says (4). And since the work is written in English, that is also a major concern. "For the Indian author, writing within the consciousness of the contextual background of a non-literate culture, every word written in English represents a collaboration of sorts as well as a re-orientation (conscious or unconscious) from the paradigmatic world of oral tradition to the syntagmatic reality of written language" (6), and he also recognizes that "[t]he nature of the confrontation permeating Native American fiction is intensely political" (8).

Perhaps more important than language itself is the "additional challenge" Native American novelists face of "making themselves understood in a prose form quite foreign to traditional Native American discourse" (Owens 9) that were "oral and communal," so Native writers also have to worry about the loss of power this "written literacy," increasingly more descriptive and historical, may cause (Owens 9). Owens goes on to say that "The privileging of the individual necessary for the conception of the modern novel (and for the conception of the American myth) is a more radical departure for American Indian cultures than for the western world as a whole" (10). "While American Indian poets, regardless of their consciousness of influence, may imagine themselves part of an ancient oral tradition of singers and story tellers, the Native American novelist works in a medium for which no close Indian prototype exists" (10) and have to "graft" Native thematic and structural principles onto an "intensely egocentric genre." Regardless of the "infinite flexibility" of the genre, and to what extent a novel

may “incorporate the cyclical, ordered, ritual-centered, and paradigmatic world of traditional oral literatures ... the Native American novelist can never step back into the collective anonymity of the tribal storyteller” (11). The consequence is the “desacralization” of the traditional materials and their consequent “decontextualization” into the world of “art” (11), or “literature.”

That is what most of us non-Native professors and critics have been doing when we teach these works as part of a corpus of “minority” or “postcolonial” literature, most of the time with a limited knowledge of the cultures represented. Decontextualization leads not only to desacralization, but also to the ignoring of specific political issues highly important to Native cultures, as that of sovereignty.

Owens believes that “In every case, however, the Native American novelist plays off and moves beyond (and challenges the reader beyond) that faint trace of “Rousseauist” ethnostalgia – most common to Euramerican treatment of Native American Indians – toward an affirmation of a syncretic, dynamic, adaptive identity in contemporary America” (12). By the way, Native critics are also providing us with plenty of new terms such as “ethnostalgia,” and more will surface here.

Owens also says that although writing for the Indian reader, Indian novelists who desire to be published must also write for the non-Indian reader (14). The result may be a richly hybridized dialogue but “one effect of this hybridization is subversive: the American Indian writer places the Eurocentric reader on the outside, as ‘other’, while the Indian reader (a comparatively small audience) is granted, for the first time, a privileged position” and thus “[t]he Native writers establishes a basis for “authoritative discourse” (14). By appropriating an essentially “other” language, the Native author is “entering a dialogue with the language itself” (15), Owens thinks.

“With few exceptions, American Indian novelists – examples of Indians who have repudiated their assigned plots – are in their fiction rejecting the American gothic with its haunted, guilt-burdened wilderness and doomed Native and emphatically making the Indian the hero of *other destinies*, other plots” (18, my emphasis). Owens is also a pioneer in recognizing the important function of humor in Native American literature, indicative of Indian identity, which makes many non-Native readers

uncomfortable inside Native novels. Because he is himself a mixed-blood, Owens examines this complication of the identity issue extensively in the work of Mourning Dove, Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, Vizenor, as do several others. We will come back to the topic.

When we get to his last chapter and Owens's description of Vizenor's writing as "trickster narratives," a historiography of the Native American novel begins to take shape, for he detects in Vizenor, whom he calls "one of the most productive as well as one of the most radically imaginative of contemporary American writers" (notice he does not say *Native American* writer), who has "a fascination with what it means to be of mixed Indian and European heritage in the contemporary world" – in Vizenor's terminology, a "crossblood." And out of this fascination arises the central and unifying figure in Vizenor's art: "the trickster" (225) who is a perfect metaphor for the contradictions of existing between two world visions. The big difference every critic recognizes in Vizenor's writing is that his characters are shape shifters, mediators, rather than victims. "In Vizenor's fictional world – a coherent and fully realized topography, as complete as Faulkner's South or Garcia Marquez's Macondo – the tortured and torturing mixedblood . . . simply refuses to perish in the dark cave of the American psyche but instead soars to freedom in avian dreams and acrobatic outrage" (225). Owens points out in Vizenor's fiction that "necessary upsetting" and "intent attacking of terminal creeds" enacted by shapeshifting. By finding cause for joyous celebration in being a crossblood, Owens believes that "Vizenor has taken Indian fiction into the future" (254). And I find significant that he claims a place for Vizenor alongside two of the best recognized writers of the post 60's literary boom in the Americas. It is a bold act of self inclusion within such a solid hegemonic literature.

Creek-Cherokee critic Craig Womack's 1999 book, *Red on Red*, starts from a radical stance enunciated in his subtitle, *Native American Literary Separatism* (that he later recants to some extent), and as he comments on the work of major Native American writers who are also critics, he draws a map of this criticism and their "strategies", going a step further than Owens. Womack invokes the comic caricatures written by nineteenth century Creek journalist Charles Gibson, in *Red English*³, as he calls for

³ A variety of non-standard English common among reservation populations.

“the forming of a substantive body of critical discourse” about their own literature (9) to discuss the purpose of Indian literature, the criteria used to determine what constitutes Native literature and the ethical issues surrounding a Native writer (10).

Having said that, and brought to the forefront a list of nineteenth and early twentieth century names worth perusing, Womack proceeds to mention enough Native writers who have been acting as critics to justify the reality of “Red on Red.” Quoting Vine Deloria’s polemic title, *We Talk You Listen*, Womack claims it is possible to “teach courses on Native lit and now even Native criticism, assigning as texts, books authored exclusively by Native people” (10). And he is absolutely correct about that. Not only there is enough great quality material available for such a course, for serious and meaningful graduate research, thesis and book writing. Mainly, there is enough material to make a course on Native literature declare its scope and focus for Native cultures can be as widely diverse as their languages are, something that may be covered by the use of English.

The difficulties in resolving these issues is very clear in Womack, who takes a radical stance in what is perhaps the strongest differential in the discourse of Native critics about their literature: that it is tribal and closely linked to discussions of sovereignty, or nationalism. Womack constructs his claim through close examination of his own Creek culture, to which the book is mostly dedicated, as he declares that literature bears some kind of relationship to communities, both writing communities and the community of the primary culture, from which they originate (4). He engages current theory in this debate, saying that “The postmodernists might laugh at claims of prioritizing insider status, questioning the very nature of what constitutes an insider and pointing out that no pure Creek, or Native, viewpoint exists, that Native and non-Native are constantly deconstructing each other” (5). But he will not abandon “a search for the affirmation of a *national* literary identity simply to fall in line with the latest literary trend” (6, my emphasis), since for Womack this identity is closely related to historical and political issues. To him Native writing “has come a long way toward legitimizing tribal experience as an appropriate subject for writing, and most importantly, toward assuming that tribal life will continue in the future” (6), while postmodern decentering might decenter the very legitimacy of a Native perspective as it does to every

other one. And after the strong affirmation I used as my first epigraph, Womack goes on to declare the American and the Native “two separate canons” (7), or what he calls his version of “red stick criticism”(11).

I say that tribal literatures are not some branch waiting to be grafted onto the main trunk. Tribal literatures are the tree, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American literatures. We are the canon (7).

Womack summons Crow Creek Sioux Elizabeth Cook-Lynn to reinforce his point as she says “The second worry for the nativist is the question of whether or not opening up the American literary canon to include native literary traditions and contemporary works will have much relevance, given its own set of unique aims – the interest in establishing the myths and metaphors of sovereign nationalism These are the elements of nationalism which have always fueled the literary canon of tribal peoples and their literary lives” (qtd in Womack 14).

Cook-Lynn is a firm believer that the enormous impact that the book and media culture in America has on its citizens, Native and non-Native, could and should be used to produce new visions and promote a re-examination of the mistaken ideas about the Native past as well as about USian history, and the place to do it is in colleges and universities. Coming from the seventies’ tradition of affirmative action, a lot of her writing is radical and sarcastic. Her 1996 book *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner*, a collection of her published essays and conferences, tackles what she sees as the central and crucial questions about reading and teaching Native literature, such as the large contribution of Native women, the preservation of tribalism, and the need for decolonization. Her dispute with Stegner comes from the centrality of his vision within Western culture that cuts off the dialogue with the indigenous habitants of the country, condemning them to silence and oblivion.⁴

As Womack, Cook-Lynn calls for a political concern associated to aesthetics as, for example, a way of struggling against canon formation

⁴ I talk at some length about Cook’s book, as well as about King, in “A Theoretical Dialogue about Reading Native Literature”. *Crop* 11 (2005-2006): 95-112.

tendencies, reinforced by books as Harold Bloom's, for is it possible for Natives to read works "where the death and burial of their presence is so explicit" and "make the necessary reconciliation with continuity and primordial historiography" (33), she asks, when they were forever excluded from making part of contemporary human thought?

Central to her criticism is the task of the Native American writer of mythologizing his relationship to place. As a firm believer in tribal affiliation, Cook-Lynn discusses American Indian fiction writers in relation to cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and First Nations Sovereignty.

Cook-Lynn sees "cosmopolitanism as the enemy of 'resistance literatures' because its criteria derives from Western tastes and aesthetics," and she points out the main problems, some of which Owens brings up as well.

1. The preference for novels over poetry, testimonials and plays;
2. The preference for literature published in European languages;
3. Writing about colonialism without using a "strident" point of view;
4. And the attraction to literature that aesthetically is "like us," or displays the complexities and subtleties of all "great art." (79)

Cook-Lynn believes that the violation of nationalistic models in fiction should be a legitimate concern in literary theory, and part of its discourse when applied to Native American Fiction. She believes it is a mistake on the part of Native American writers to think that they can become "cosmopolitan," hybrid, or even exotic, with impunity (84).

She proceeds to define Erdrich's vision as "apocalyptic and Christian-oriented," Welch as dismissive of Blackfeet nationhood, and Momaday's mysticism as self-absorbed, while Vizenor invitation to "whoever wants to be tribal can join the tribe" is seen as lacking seriousness. She even thinks her own novel (*From the River's Edge*) effaces the ambiguity in the Indian rights struggle of politics and land.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) seems to Cook-Lynn the most ambitious novel published by an American Indian fiction writer for asserting a collective indigenous retrieval of lands stolen from them through colonization and creating a "fictionalized pantribal nationalism."

Cook-Lynn admires her for clinging to “the idea that the imagination plays a functional role in political and social life, an idea which most of the native traditionalists I have known have always held” (89). Perhaps Cook-Lynn is tickled by the novel creating a nightmarish vision of what America could become to its colonizers: “the triumph of the indigenes as tidal waves of South and North American Indians wipe out borders and reclaim lands” (Silko 91).

Laguna Pueblo writer Paula Gunn Allen, in her essay entitled “Who is your Mother? Red roots of white feminism” (ironically published in an anthology about “multicultural literacy”) seems to group naturally with Womack and Cook-Lynn. Allen uses the Laguna Pueblo New Mexico gynocratic societies in a region where “your mother’s identity is key to your own identity” (13) to spin her argument.

Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same thing as being lost – isolated, abandoned, self estranged, and alienated from your own life. (14)

And she adds: “American Indian Nations place great value on tradition” (14). To Gunn Allen the importance of continuity with one’s cultural origins runs counter to contemporary American ideas where immigrants seem eager to cast off cultural ties, seeing their own parents as backward, restrictive, or shameful. This attitude of rejecting tradition reaches back to colonial history, she affirms, and nowadays is validated by every institution in the country. Feminist practice follows that road as well for the loss of tradition and memory is at the roots of oppression, since it comes with a loss of positive sense of self.

She believes American society should not only recognize and honor Native Americans, it should model itself after them. If Native American tradition had been followed “the place of women in society would become central, the distribution of goods and power would be egalitarian, the elderly would be respected, honored, and protected as a primary social and cultural resource, the ideals of physical beauty would be considerably enlarged Additionally, the destruction of the biota, the life sphere, and the natural resources of the planet would be curtailed, and

the spiritual nature of human an non-human life would become a primary organizing principle of human society” (15). Allen offers the example of suffragette Eva Emery Dye, from Oregon, who found in Sacagawea, the Shoshoni teenager figure buried in the Lewis and Clark journal (who traveled with the expedition carrying her infant son while she acted as a guide and a translator) an embodiment of her vision of feminism: “a historical figure whose life would symbolize the strengthened power of women” (20-21).

But to Gunn Allen the roots of American feminism reach back even beyond Sacagawea since the first white women who arrived in this continent became well accounted with tribal women as neighbors who shared food, information, child and health care. This is very visible in pioneer women’s diaries, as in the famous Canadian accounts of Susana Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill. Allen also believes that questions as intermarriage between Indians and whites or Indians and blacks had been as little explored as the account of those women’s encounters, leaving visible only the degradation of Indian women into squaws or princesses (21), a subject I will return to when examining Janice Acoose’s book.

She is aware that as she writes, around 1986 (the year *Sacred Hoop* was published), her version of the roots of American feminism must seem far away from mainstream and radical versions of feminine history. She is “keenly” aware of the lack of image Americans have about the continent’s past and “intensely” conscious of popular notions of Indian women as beasts of burden, squaws, traitors, and so on (18). She claims women should get aware of their history in this continent and how the same forces also devastated gynarchies in Britain and in America, and in ancient African civilizations, for example (19). To her the wars of imperial conquest have waged over the land and its resources as well as the bodies, the minds and hearts of the peoples of the earth (19). To Allen “Indianization” is not a simple concept, one that North Americans strongly resist, but it has taken place. Regardless of its recognition it is at the roots of the most valued personal, family, social and political arenas (23).

It is very important to acknowledge Paula Gunn Allen’s major contribution to Native Studies by devising curriculum suggestions for university courses that include critical as well as pedagogical material in a way that the reader can perceive their critical foundations. Published in

1983, *Studies in American Indian Literature*, aims at integrating Native American studies into the study of USian literature at every level, to provide insights and critical approaches to Native literature, to provide a study diverse in aesthetics and style, but moreover, it wants to enrich English programs by opening possibilities for much needed research in the area (viii-ix).

In the essay that became best known in the book, “The Sacred Hoop: a Contemporary Perspective,” Allen examines the difficulties in teaching non-Western literatures to an audience familiar with the terms “primitive,” “savage,” “pagan” and “folklore” applied to these works (3). The basic difference between Western and Native American literature, Allen points out, is in their assumed purposes, for Native Literature “is never simply pure self-expression.” The tribes do not celebrate individual ability to feel emotion since everyone is able to do so. And to suggest that one’s personal emotions should be imitated is to impose on someone else’s personal integrity. Native American culture – through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (we call myths) and tales – “embody, articulate and share reality” and bring private self into harmony and balance with this reality (4).

The artistry of the tribes is married to the essence of language itself, for through language one can share one’s singular being with that of the community and know within oneself the communal knowledge of the tribe. (4)

Trying to get out of the more conservative, or separatist, line of criticism, but still radical in his embracing of postmodern strategies, stands Gerald Vizenor. His two books published in 1999, *Manifest Manners* and *Postindian Conversations*, introduce series of neologisms that seem to exert the shamanic function of exorcising terms associated to stereotyping and victimization of Natives that became characteristic of colonial discourse dilemmas. As Womack, who talks from his Creek experience, Vizenor departs from his Ojibwa inheritance where he finds the mere “Presence of natives ... an obvious narrative on sovereignty” (181).

Vizenor introduces the ironic play with the founding father’s notion of manifest destiny in *Manifest Manners*. (The term originated in an anecdote about a university president who encouraged students to greet

minority students in hallway encounters to make them feel integrated.) The massive teaching of European and Euro-American literature is called another type of *manifest manners* by Vizenor, who defends Indians write a *literature of survivance* – a crossing of survival and resistance. According to him Native literature is not “mere reaction” (vii), but “re-invention.” Since Indian was a European invention, Native stories of survival and resistance dislocate the original meaning into figures he calls *postindian warriors*, or *word warriors*, those in charge of dissociating themselves, through their stories, from the existing perception of *Indianness*. Vizenor’s post-Indian mixedbloods, for example, possess tribal, but not national values and maybe that is why his writing troubles other Native writers beyond the playful, trickster-like quality of his approach to contemporary Native reality.

In the neologism creation arena, addressing the postcolonial theories, is Greek-Cherokee Canadian writer Thomas King. In “Godzilla vs. postcolonial,” a 1997 essay, King declares the term postcolonial unacceptable to describe Native literature. And he does not hesitate to call the triumvirate – pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial – terms that “reek of unabashed ethnocentrism and well-meaning dismissal, and they point to a deep-seated assumption that is at the heart of most well-intentioned studies of Native literatures” (242).

To King, the problems with the term postcolonial reside in its inescapable nationalism and in its dangerous assumption that any discussion starting point is the advent of Europeans to North America. He also accuses postcolonial studies of organizing literature progressively, implying progress and improvement, as well as of assuming that the catalyst for contemporary Native writing is the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed.

Pre-colonial literature, thus, according to King, “has no relationship whatsoever to colonial literature. The two are neither part of a biological or natural cycle nor does one anticipate the other.... Yet, contemporary Native American Literatures cannot be classified among the postcolonial literatures of the world for the obvious fact that there is not yet a “post” to the colonial status of Native Americans” (242).

Despite protests of not being a theorist, King does offer us four terms to describe contemporary Native literature: tribal, interfusional,

polemical and associational, believing they are “less centered and do not, within the terms themselves, privilege one culture over another; they avoid the sense of progress in which primitivism gives way to sophistication, suggesting as it does that such movement is both natural and desirable; their identity points to a cultural and literary continuum for Native literature which do not depend on anomalies such as the arrival of Europeans in North America or the advent of non-Native literature in this hemisphere” (243).

Tribal, he says, refers to that literature which exists primarily within a tribe or community, which is shared exclusively by the members of that community and presented and retained in Native language. It is virtually invisible outside that community partly because of the language barrier and partly because it has little interest in making itself available to an outside audience, like that of the Hopi.

“Polemical” refers to that literature in Native language, English or French, that concerns itself with the culture clash between Natives and non-Natives and which champions native values over non-Native values. Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* (1984), Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* (1973), D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded* (1976), *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978) and Howard Adam’s *Prison of Grass*. It chronicles the imposition of non-Native expectations and political, social, scientific insinuations on Native communities and describes the methods of resistance used by Native peoples to maintain their culture and above all their communities.

“Interfusional” King uses to describe part of Native literature which blends oral and written literature. Howard Norman in *The Wishing Bone Cycle* (1976) and Harry Robinson’s *Write it on Your Heart* (1989) are the examples. These writers tell their stories to someone who then translates them into English, as Norman has done with what he calls “ethnopoems”; or transcribes them into writing, as Wendy Wickwire has done with Robinson’s tales. These storytellers develop an oral syntax that defeats readers’ efforts to read the stories silently, to themselves, and encourages them to read aloud. And they keep metaphors, structures, themes and characters from oral literature. Their main value of this literature may well be the influence on contemporary writers, as King himself likes to acknowledge. Or Jeanette Armstrong, for example, in her novel *Slash*

(1985), that tells of growing up Indian in a prejudiced school and a prejudiced society, but manages to stay optimistic, pointing to a possible connection between the cultures.

“Associational” would then be most of the contemporary fiction being written by Natives today. Most often, it describes a Native community and although including non-Native characters or communities, does not center on the latter or on conflicts between the two cultures. Instead, it focuses on the daily activities and intricacies of contemporary Native life. It also ignores traditional plots and climaxes valued by non-Native literature. It also leans towards the group, the collective story rather than the single character, a fiction that devalues heroes and villains altogether. Most importantly, it is a fiction that avoids judgments and conclusions. This literature provides a limited access to the Native world and the non-Native reader can associate with it without feeling a part of it. It helps remind Natives of their cultural values and reinforces a present of cultural tenacity and a viable future.

Examples are Basil H. Johnston’s *Indian School Days* (1988), a biographical narrative of his years at a Jesuit boarding school where Native boys are not seen as victims of their religious jailers, but both sides of the cultural border are given choices and responsibilities. And Ruby Slipperjack’s *Honour the Sun* (1987), a diary-like narrative that follows the daily life of an isolated Native community in northern Ontario. There is no attempt at glorifying the Native way of life or at blaming problems as alcoholism or tuberculosis on their white neighbors.

The feeling of “almost” understanding what is going on in these non-judgmental portraits of native communities is also found in King’s work. His novel *Truth and Bright Water* (1999), for example, introduces Native characters more or less integrated to both their traditional communities and the white world around them, mythological figures, a pervading sense of humor which pokes fun at both sides of the “contact zone.” It gives us Indians who ride motorcycles and shoot at Buffalo with paint balls in the same canvas that portrays an abusive Native father. We also have a mysterious trio of ghost dogs, a suicidal teenager, a very intriguing quilt that displays razor blades and photos among its many components. Several members of these two little towns on the Canadian/US border go back and forth by pulling themselves across aboard a bucket tied to a rope, ignoring national

frontiers and national laws with the same ease they ignore cultural frontiers. But to the non-Native, the reading of King's books, as that of many other Native writers, leaves us feeling as outsiders. Not in a bad way, it is only that slightly uncomfortable feeling that some of those references and icons were not entirely grasped and that those jokes would be a lot funnier if we were Natives.

King alerts us that these categories do not cover works such as Vizenor's postmodern novels *Darkness in St Louis Bearheart* (1978) and *Griever: an American Monkey King in China* (1987), or Graig Strete's surreal science fiction: *The Bleeding Man* (1977) and *If All Else Fails* (1980), emphasizing the great variety of contemporary Native production, spread through all known genres and some of its own making.

The terms he suggests, King warns us, are not "bags" into which we can collect and store the whole of Native literature: "They are more properly *vantage points* from which we can see a particular literary landscape" (243-44, my emphasis). From a non-comparative point-of-view, I have to add, but rather from an insider's view.

The terms all these Native writers have been proposing have to be studied and considered not only in their validity for the examination of Native literature, but as reflections which can make us look beyond the theoretical mirror we keep holding up to them. After all, we all grew up with many "Indian" stereotypes in literature and film and the market for those natives or non-Natives who want to do something that escapes the old cowboys and Indians plot may be scarce. It is still very strange in this twenty-first century to see Indians who do not fit the imaginary roles we are used to and do not speak or write in traditional ways.

Despite all attempts to the contrary, Native peoples have not only survived, they have thrived and created their own space and their own voice within these cultures we call our own. So we need to be reminded that Natives, as King puts it, "in addition to a useful past, ... also have an active present" (246).

Janice Acoose uses the term "post-halfbreed" in discussing the work of fellow Native writers, including that of Maria Campbell and her famous autobiographical novel *Halfbreed* (1973), in *Iskwewak – Kah'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak* (or *All Our Relations*) subtitled – *Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws*. We soon perceive that Acoose's task is to

examine the ideological influences of what she refers to as “white-canadian-christian patriarchy” (all written in lower case) and their consequences for her people (8; 10) and that is done through an analysis of literary texts.

Her introduction is a celebration of her heritage where she names “all her relations” and makes them real with the insertion of several family photos. As she describes her family, mainly the women relatives, she realizes they “fit none of the white stereotypes of Indigenous women. She remembers them as “extremely powerful, resourceful, and dynamic women who vitally contributed to the survival” of the family and were responsible for her own “spiritual flame” (11).

Having reclaimed her own self and registered her personal history, the next step in Acoose’s identity recovery journey is to name several Native women writers who wrote autobiographically-based narratives before her: Emma LaRocque, Beatrice Culleton, Jeanette Armstrong, Lee Maracle, Ruby Slipperjack, Marie Anneharte Baker, Beth Cuthand, Louise Halfe (39). The list seems to prove that the stereotypical images of Indian women as romantic princesses or lewd squaws found in non-Native literature need to be examined critically against what the Native women themselves have to say. And she proceeds to examine the construction of the two stereotypes named in the title within the Canadian literary canon.

Acoose understands the stereotypes as a fundamental European Christian patriarchal ideology of the fifteenth century brought to America by the settlers that carried on into the nationalistic character even after the weakening of colonial ties. She cleverly analyses how Indigenous women who had relations with Christian white men had to be “elevated” beyond their status and thus became the equivalent of royalty. She reminds us of “Dona Marina, the Aztec who had a *liaison* with Hernando Cortez; Pocahontas, who saved John Smith from death; and also offers several illustrations of the New World depicting ‘regal looking women’ and ‘majestic-type women’ with bow and arrow” and barely clothed. After the colonial period, the bad Indian woman, or squaw, justified the imperialistic expansion west and the agendas of missionaries, fur traders and explorers. Acoose displays abundant documentation from both Euro-Canadian history and literature about these stereotypes that continue to be used despite their ethnocentric views (44-45). To these documents Acoose opposes an overview of the roles of Indian women inside their cultures,

with examples taken from Howard Adam's *Prison of Grass* and Emma LaRocque's *Defathering the Indian*, both published in 1975.

Next, Acoose demonstrates how the perpetuation of these stereotypes is damaging to Indian women as they encourage "sexual, physical, verbal or psychological violence" against them. Here, too, she takes examples of Indigenous women who fought the combination of racism and sexism, legally and politically, reclaiming the central role of "culture keepers" and the autonomy over their bodies and relations with the other they held within their cultures. And here is where Acoose calls for an appropriation of the English language to represent their experience, to re-name and redefine the original peoples (58).

Chapter four is for us, non-Natives, one of the most interesting in the book because it is here that she deconstructs images of Indigenous women in texts written by acclaimed Euro-Canadian writers Margaret Laurence and William Patrick Kinsella. To remain mostly in the company of women I will only comment on the example of Margaret Laurence, a writer I happen to like very much and whose multicultural west coast world I thought was also quite critical. Acoose acknowledges Laurence's "compassion and understanding" for her character Piquette Tonerre, in "The Loons" (a tale from *A Bird in the House*, 1985). Although "sympathetic to the Native," the narrator of the story and interpreter of events is Vanessa MacLeod, "a white Christian lower-middle-class girl whose standing of reality is filtered through a racist, classist and male-privileged ideological value system," in Acoose's words (79). Piquette, the Métis girl, is consistently victimized and seems never to measure up to Vanessa's white standards. "Piquette and her family are represented as hopeless and contemptible victims" and the Métis in Laurence's fiction, as seen by Acoose, "are people whose language is neither Cree nor French" (80), that is, dispossessed even of a language of their own. More importantly, Acoose detects in Laurence a consistent use of negative grammatical constructions to describe the Métis, and the death of the girl as "a victim of her own vices", disappoints her because it is such a cliché.

As a counterpoint to Laurence's representation of the Métis woman, Acoose offers Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, its analysis occupying a whole chapter. By the very reference of a book by a Métis, published in 1973, or prior to Laurence's stories, Acoose may be implying that the material to

“educate” non-Native writers was available and was ignored, not by Laurence in particular, but by the literary culture of the time. For Campbell’s text, Acoose says, “challenges existing stereotypes and images of Indigenous women by providing a vivid spiritual, social, political, and economic context” (90).

Campbell is also an important model as a woman and a writer: “one of the first few Indigenous people who appropriated the colonizer’s language to name her oppressor’s unjust systems, laws and processes, and subsequently to work towards decolonization” (91). That is reinforced, Acoose points out, by addressing members of the colonial world in her introduction while her use of the derogatory term “Halfbreed” to refer to herself is disturbing because it is a “reminder of Canadian society’s racism towards them” (93).

Campbell’s book opened a very important path to other Indigenous women and Acoose also comes up with Jeanette Armstrong, Beth Cuthand, Louise Halfe, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Marie Annharte Baker, Patricia Monture-Okanee, Monica Goulet, Marylyn Dumont, Mary Sky Blue Morin, Lee Maracle, Ruby Slipperjack and Beatrice Culleton, among a long row of brave women who survived to tell their stories and find comfort and solidarity in their sisters (104), and to thwart the notion that they “are a dying race, suffering victims with no hope of survival, or ‘Natives’ bound and determined to assimilate and make it in the white world” (108).⁵

Jeanette Armstrong calls attention to the fact that, while in the United States, several aboriginal critics (Owens, Vizenor, Paula Gunn Allen, Alexie, for example) are getting considerable attention, even if in a market saturated with books about Aboriginal peoples (the 1980s and 1990s) mostly by non-aboriginal experts, in Canada Native authors and critics have found the academy a less than comfortable space. While the number of published aboriginal poets, novelists and dramatists increases, discussion of their writing has been done mainly by non-aboriginal

⁵ For an extended version of the analysis of Acoose’s book, see “Can we Speak of a Native American Critical Theory?”. *Brasil/Canadá: visões, paisagens e perspectivas do Ártico ao Antártico*. Org. Núbia Jacques Hanciau. Abecan-FURG, 2006. 93-100.

academics and journalists. Armstrong herself has been finding ways of voicing their own views of the matter, slowly building what Kimberley Blaeser calls “an ‘organic’ Native critical language” or “tribal-centered criticism.” Blaeser does not reject Euro-American models of criticism (as Owens does not dismiss Bakhtin, or Womack Said), but she does insist that aboriginal people begin to develop their own critical techniques, even out of their own creative literature. This “literature as theory” strategy was very successful within African-American and Chicana Literature, for example. Good examples of that emerging “theorizing criticism” are essays by Thomson Highway, Gerald Vizenor, or Lenore Keeshig-Tobias’ use of the “trickster” as a way of talking about Native spirituality, relating it to politics, and humor in aboriginal writing.

The reason for this mapping I find in the scattered, limited and insistently postcolonial readings of Native literature enacted in the Brazilian academy. Even in North America Native American studies courses and the inclusion of Native American literature in English department programs present problems not that easy to solve. But in Brazil we have gone, if that much, from an all Anglo-American canon to a fragmentary “Literatures in English” that either contemplates specific postcolonial literatures or a mixed bag of works from several postcolonial realities with wide ranging common traits, as hybridity.

Perhaps it is all we can do given the small size of our subject in our fragmented departments of modern languages that try hard to accommodate a world greatly widened by the fast globalizing of information. But if we reach beyond the literary text and listen very closely to how these voices outside our own life experience read themselves, we may be able to do a much better job than when using only our own, in most cases Euro-American, tools and strategies.

The study of North American Native critics can also be useful in Brazil to lead us into considering our own Native literature as literature, rather than throwing it into the category of mythological or juvenile narrative where Native literature has been segregated by editors, bookstores and teachers. Or dismissing books as Elaine Potiguar’s hybrid and difficult to classify text, as “not quite literature because of its highly autobiographic content” (as I recently heard from an M.A. candidate). I prefer to read *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2002) as a book that enlarges our notions of

what a novel is, as Silko, for one, has written “novels” like Potiguara’s that incorporate testimony, poetry, autobiography and fiction. Potiguara uses the multiple narrative forms to better recover the 500 year encounter with Euro-American culture and its consequences for the Native peoples while it claims a space for Brazilian Native women in the history of our continent. She does that in a transcultural and transnational poetic voyage that gives out a sense of Native perception of time where past present and future are simultaneous, and is totally immersed in the social-political situation of Indians in contemporary Brazil. The book is postmodern in its structure, postcolonial in its conception and postcanonical in its appeal for the opening up of national history and of the novel genre itself. She invites us all into this inheritance we have been ignoring, when not despising altogether.

A list of critical readings we can call “Red on red”:

1970, Vine Deloria’s *We Talk, You Listen*, and 1973’s *God is Red*. Decades before Vizenor, Deloria articulates the idea that for Natives, in their peculiar experience of this continent, the basic recognition of their power and sovereignty should be a major aim.

1986, Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*.

1993, Jeanette Armstrong organizes *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nation Analysis of Literature*.

1994, Allen Velie organizes *Native American Perspectives on Literature and History*.

1995, Robert Warrior’s *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* discusses not only political sovereignty, but also intellectual sovereignty.

1997, Jace Weaver coins the term “communitism” in *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community*.

1998, Vizenor’s *Fugitive Proses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. The last chapter, Native “transmotions,” makes a strong case for Native sovereignty as grounded on the ongoing tradition of Native

storytelling, both oral and written. Vizenor introduces several neologisms as an attempt to escape colonial and postcolonial deconstructive dilemmas: sovenance – sovereignty and survivance; transmotion, for example.

2000, Scott Lyons introduces “rhetorical sovereignty” in the essay “What do American Indians want from writing?”

2005, Robert Warrior’s *The People and the Word: Reading Native Non-fiction*.

2006, Heath Justice’s *Our Fire Survives the Storm: a Cherokee Literary History*.

2006, Weaver, Womack and Warrior organize *American Indian Literary Nationalism*.

2006, David Truer’s *Native American Fiction: A User’s Manual*. A highly controversial book that even doubts that Native literature exists.

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New Challenges from the Lost Unity: Shakespeare, Performance and Difference

Erick Ramalho de Souza Lima
Centro de Estudos Shakespeareanos

Shakespeare is known to face an incongruous challenge as he fails in his attempt to represent a unity of action and language in his plays. However, some contemporary literary theoreticians have criticised the prevailing existence of monolithic unity in Shakespearean plays. This criticism arises mostly from the notion of performative identity, which has its origins in J. L. Austin's speech act theory. Thus, the question of unity in Shakespeare poses at least two challenges: 1) the literary challenge that Shakespeare faces as he failingly struggles to represent unity onstage; 2) a theoretical challenge to contemporary approaches, which, grounded on performative identity, have not yet satisfactorily dealt with unity in Shakespeare's text. I will here examine Shakespeare's attempt and failure to represent unity onstage and, also, how the lack of unity in his plays undermines the efforts of seeing a monolithic unity in his text.

My aim is to give further evidence to the lack of unity in Shakespearean plays and to demonstrate how the non-existence (or, even, the impossibility) of such unity challenges performative identity theory and speech act theory. Methodologically, I have preferred to cross selected examples from the Shakespeariana—mostly from *Titus Andronicus*¹ (*Tit.* henceforth), in which this subject-matter is manifest – with current theoretical topics chosen amongst representative studies.

¹ All Shakespeare's quotations are from the *Complete Works* edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968) and indicated by act, scene and line accordingly.

1. Shakespeare challenged

Before being a theoretical problem, the lack of an unattainable unity upon the stage was an aesthetic challenge to Shakespeare himself, who unsuccessfully sought it in dramatic artistry and poetic language. Shown onstage in its multiple developments, Shakespeare's attempt is one of uniting language and the human body in a representational effort thus described by Terry Eagleton:

Shakespeare's utopian solution to the conflicts which beset him—an organic unity of body and language—is by definition unattainable. For the body can never be fully present in discourse: it is part of the very nature of a sign to 'absent' its referent . . . A 'linguistic body' would thus seem something of a contradiction in terms: the solid, unified entity we call a body is fissured, rendered non-identical with itself, by the language which is its very breath. (97, 101)

Once it is only ideally possible while hinted throughout the staging of the plays, the unity is unreachable, hence lost, as it is gazed at in its remote dramatic possibilities. It can be in effect illustrated from socio-cultural and political frames where it is most visible; namely, in the "interrelations of language, desire, law, money and the body" (Eagleton ix), as seen, for instance, when, in *Measure for Measure*, Isabella is "prepared to exchange Claudio's head for an intact hymen" (50). Lear's tearing up of his own clothes is also an indication for this lost unity, since in it "Shakespeare deconstructs this binary opposition," Eagleton explains, between Nature and Culture, "showing how each term inheres in the other" in a cultural environment where "[t]he reconciliation of Nature and culture is, inseparably, a uniting of the body and language. For the body, however much a social product, is also a biological given, and language is Shakespeare's primary symbol of the culture which surpasses and transforms its limits" (Eagleton 90-92).

Further evidence has been given by Danson and by Tricomi in two separate analyses of *Tit.*, in which they sustain the idea of the Shakespearean quest for some sort of unity that unveils the "struggle to turn the language of words into the language of action" (Danson 51), and also a blatant effort "to unite language and action in an endeavour to render the events of the tragedy more real and painful" (Tricomi 32). All of this joins in the

conclusion that Shakespearean characters' interference with each other's bodies puts in the same plane words and action in some sort of literalness. The word cannot replace the thing, but the struggle for this in part becomes an attempted unity drawing heavily on ultimate poetic language, for "[t]he more intense their emotions, the more intricately florid the diction of Shakespeare's characters tends to grow" (Eagleton 40), which makes of Shakespeare's language "material power, an active intervention into the world at least as real as a blow on the head" (Eagleton 9).

Grounded on Eagleton's, Danson's and Tricomi's, another analysis of the lost unity in Shakespeare, exclusive of *Tit.*, has been carried out in Ramalho (2006), and some of these conclusions are here useful. In that play "the limits of dramatic conventions and, unexpectedly, silence and physical mutilation are united in a performance that does not separate words from action. Characters begin to be silenced through the severing of body parts related to speech (heads and tongue) and to writing (hands)," which makes a line like Aaron's "Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand, / Blood and revenge are hammering in my head" (2.3 38-39), suggestive of a recurring rhetorical effect, be physically realised (Ramalho 85-86). Thus, when Titus offers to Aaron "lend me thy hand, and I will give thee mine" (3.1 186), his hand is actually severed and given away as it shows how to a degree language can become action.

The unreachable unity attempted at through violence leads the play to a flux of enactment at any rate dissolving in performance the restraints of fixed identities, as observed when Titus's daughter Lavinia enters the stage without her tongue, handless and raped. To the horror of the other characters fearing the deadly silence physically imposed on her, she expresses her condition both verbally – by pointing out the words telling the Philomela myth in an open copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – and non-verbally – through her meaningful body.² Thus,

² This view is supported by E. Waith's (18-30) assertion that when they find difficulty in expression in both *Tit.* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (one of the sources of the play, a copy of which taken onstage), characters victimised by violence are unable to express their suffering in words and are transformed into animal or plants (Ovid) and mutilated bodies (Shakespeare).

like the subject of a Renaissance anamorphic painting, which can be seen from one point of view as a vital, dynamic figure, and from another point of view as a decaying corpse, Lavinia is indeed a 'changing piece', a cipher and repository of meaning continually reinterpreted through the observations and voices of others. (Cunningham 70)

These multiple aspects embodied by Lavinia can be deemed a primary onstage instance of performative identity as first conceived by Judith Butler's borrowing from Austin's theory, or, in a nutshell of her own: "Within speech act theory, a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler 13).³ In *Tit.*, the thing named and the thing destroyed are body parts made into props, epitomised in Titus's detached hand held amidst Lavinia's stumps ("Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thine arms." [3.1 279-82])—"teeth" curiously stands for "arms" in the Folio), besides Lavinia's own body silenced through violence, while body parts related to speech (e.g. tongue) are made into dead natural parts. Lavinia is not necessarily anything pre-determined that would exist invariably as such, but symbolises ways of being – or, in Greek as devised in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1448a 1), ethoi, meaning characters and behaviour, i.e. social/cultural manners of subjectivity – ever changing at the glance of her fellow characters. Lavinia does not display an "essential" monolithic identity, but simultaneous aspects of a multifaceted identity fleeting in the lines of the text that builds it.

A less dramatic instance of the diversity in performing identities in Shakespeare is Rosalind in *As You Like It*. As widely known, like all of her gender on the Elizabethan stage, Rosalind is a female character played by a boy-actor, who disguises herself as the boy Ganymede ("no worse a name than Jove's own page" [1.3 633]). This multiple identity performance,

³ Under Wittgenstein's influence on Austin's philosophy of language, his speech act theory became public in his 1962 book *How to Do Things with Words*, which also triggered the first edition of John Searle's *Speech Acts* three years later. No matter how tight classifications have been – not sadly – overcome by either their inner limitations or the rise of poststructuralism, Austin's theory (despite the strict division of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts) remains useful (see Daniel Vanderveken and Susumu Kubo's 'Introduction').

fragmentary in itself, is indicative of the most authentic notion of the otherness made clearer when Rosalind is followed by Celia in taking up a manly figure fittingly named *Aliena* – after the Latin word for “strange” and “other” – whereby she proves to be, more than a stranger, an Other. Thus, “But what will you be called,” asks Rosalind, to which Celia answers: “Something that hath a reference to my state. / No longer Celia, but *Aliena*” (I. iii 122-25). As a result, both friends’ cases lead to a three-ness of the girl played by a boy who plays another boy in a multiple representational game of onstage identities.

Besides further evidence, conclusive in itself, of the lack of unity in Shakespeare’s plays, this is also proof of the actual power of language to interfere with reality. According to speech act theory, in a particular context, an utterance like “close the door” would have an actual impact on reality, for it triggers the action it calls for, thereby rearranging the environment in which the utterance is made, being itself the performance of an act, as Petruccio’s blunt request in *Taming of the Shrew*: “And kiss me, Kate” (2.1 320). When tragic to the extreme, such instances can make of an utterance like “I’ll stop your mouth” (*Tit.* 2.3 184) cross the boundaries of the action of gagging someone and reach, not without clumsy absurdness, (e.g. Lavinia’s) tongue severing.

2. Shakespeare’s new challenges to theory

The connection between Shakespeare’s plays and theory is a widely talked about subject within and outside academic circles, and no newness lies either on stating that theory has always profited from Shakespearean plays. Recalling their relation to fashionable contemporary criticism and theory turns out to be valuable for my present scope. As Eagleton explains:

Though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein, and Derrida. Perhaps this is simply to say that though there are many ways in which we have thankfully left this conservative patriarch behind, there are other ways in which we have yet to catch up with him. (ix-x)

Of these influential names, Freud has triggered many psychoanalytic analyses, mostly of *Hamlet*, in the twentieth century in the wake of Ernest

Jones' *Hamlet and Oedipus*, while Nietzschean philosophy, as read by Derrida and Foucault, has been established as one foundational tenet of poststructuralism. In turn, the foundations of both poststructuralism and postmodernism, their borrowing from Nietzsche included, have been at the chore of an ongoing critique published both in the *Cambridge Quarterly* and in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, which are rather helpful to the present study.

David Parker's essay is close to Eagleton's association of Shakespeare with Nietzsche. Indeed, by considering "[Frederic] Jameson's rather limited understanding of Nietzsche's project in relation to ethics and morality," Parker assumes that "the postmodernist politics of difference in Anglo-American literary studies" can be confronted with the need of revisionism (299, 304). Thus, according to Parker, it is precisely by reading otherness that Jameson's interpretation becomes far-fetched and feeble, particularly if read against a philosophical background (299).⁴

Another of these essays is David Roberts' article "Sleeping Beauties: Shakespeare, Sleep and the Stage," in which the author proceeds with an examination of a postmodern exhibition in London by the artist Cornelia Parker – in which displayed items in glass cases were suddenly followed by a real actress truly asleep – so as to show the effects of a sleeping person seen live and not returning the visitors' gazes. Roberts proves this to be comparable to several of Shakespeare's characters, such as Lady Macbeth, Richard III, Titania, and Lear, in their different relations, whose sleep is watched both on and off-stage. Tracing back features now called postmodern to their early modern roots, he examines Shakespeare's ability in building what

⁴ Parker deems as 'doubtful' the presence of Nietzsche where he is called for as 'the foundational philosopher of the new', and remains more important to poststructuralism than Derrida, Foucault or Lyotard (Parker 299). Jameson's shortage of Nietzschean quotations (Parker 303) belongs to his misreading of concepts such as good and evil, feeble before Nietzsche's 'yes-saying' (*Ja-Sagen*, for which, see Müller-Lauter 248-301), which '... illustrates ... the close link between ethical and aesthetic values for those of us who have not been too heavily socialized into evaluative relativism by the politics of difference' (314). See Jenkins (212-238), for performative identity in Nietzsche, Soyinka (140-160), for a provoking reading of his philosophy, and Ramalho (81-94) for associating Nietzsche with Shakespeare.

after Plutarch was known as “speaking pictures,” , particularly important to the scopophilic tendency in the seventh century, that is, the quite up-to-date love for beholding, or, in his words “of looking in and into things” (Roberts 236).

Particularly relevant to the speech act and performative theories, Roberts pinpoints resemblances between sleep as a stage strategy in Shakespearean plays and the aforementioned postmodern exhibition where the sleeping one becomes the object to the eye of the beholder. He sustains that “Shakespeare’s speaking pictures depict their sleeping subjects, not just by staging them but by speaking of them” (238), which links intrinsically the word to the depiction of the linguistic body. In fact, “the complexity of Shakespeare’s ideological dilemmas,” Eagleton explains, “arise from the fact that they do not take the form of ‘simple’ contradictions, in which each term is the polar opposite of the other; on the contrary, in ‘deconstructive’ fashion, each term seems confusingly to inhere in its antagonist” (97-101).

This critique is important in providing the following arguments with essential aspects of the contemporary state of affairs in literary studies whereby I contextualise the present investigation of Shakespeare’s lost unity and its defiance to theory as being problematic in itself.⁵ The quest for a representational unity on the verge of a totalitarian (or “master,” if fashionable jargon is to be employed) monolithic unity of language (speech) and thing (body) is lost in Shakespeare, and its theoretical consequences can be now focused on in relation to Catherine Belsey’s *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. She

⁵ In another of the aforementioned studies, Paul Crowther (362) argues against “a fashionable cultural relativism that is sceptical about the objectivity of aesthetic and canonical values” promulgated by “that transdisciplinary mélange sometimes called ‘theory’. . . inspired in general terms by Foucault,” the origins of which are in “discursive practices . . . presented as a general way of understanding all cultural products. Every activity—including artifice and representation—is cleansed of its concreteness and/or physicality and repackaged as a mode of meaning or signification,” from which a “consumerist” viewpoint springs in interpreting the literary artwork (Crowther 365) – an example of my own being the overuse of business lingo (e.g. “negotiation”) in criticism practiced since last century’s end.

maintains that the performance of identity on early modern stage foregrounds, in linguistic usage, a broader flux of contextual reality, especially observed in soliloquies, for

when the soliloquy is all in the first person, when the subject defined there is continuous and non-fragmentary, the occurrence of “I” in speech is predicated on a gap between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the utterance, the subject who is defined in the speech. Since the subject of the enunciation always exceeds the subject of the utterance, the “I” cannot be fully present in what it says of itself. It is this gap which opens the possibility of glimpsing an identity behind what is said, a silent self anterior to the utterance. (Belsey 48-49)

This gap is indeed observed in cultural shape-shifters, so to speak, like Rosalind/Ganymede and Celia/Aliena as they speak in the first person, when the “I” of each one of them is additionally split into, at least, the simultaneous three shown above. What results from this is that the subject of the speech in this utterance is linguistically apart from the subject of the enunciation, the three-ness of such a character of course being, therefore, all but “continuous and non-fragmentary” (Belsey 48).

Belsey’s views assume non-fragmentation where Shakespeare shows it coming about on the edges of representation, and, likewise, what she sustains regarding utterance and silence alongside identity is by its own definition undermined by her own notions of a silent self existing before the word uttered or an identity behind what is said. As observed in *Tit.*, silence is not to be found before or after speech, but within the word that carries it in its physical realisation through ultimate speech acts making a body (Lavinia’s) unable to articulate language orally for its lack of tongue. Moreover, Judith Butler’s following arguments come as further counter-evidence to Belsey’s findings:

the materiality of bodies is simply and only a linguistic effect which is reducible to a set of signifiers. Such an distinction overlooks the materiality of the signifier itself. Such an account also fails to understand materiality as that which is bound up with signification from the start; to think through the indissolubility of materiality and signification is no easy matter. To posit by way of language a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition. (Butler 30)

The discursive materiality that certainly goes far beyond signifiers can be made into representation, even if only transiently and in part, in the violence that unites language and body by silencing/mutilating them together and at the same time. Shakespeare's lost unity broadens Butler's questioning, for it stages the impossibility of a body that is linguistic by nearly realising it in performing language with clear effects on the body. Entailing the association of body, language, identity, and performance, this eventually leads to a crossing of these Shakespearean topics with the poststructuralist view, if any, of the body underlying contemporary theory and criticism:

it is difficult to know ... who or what is designated by the term 'poststructuralism', and perhaps even more difficult to know what to retrieve under the sign of 'the body'. And yet these two signifiers have for some feminists and critical theorists seemed fundamentally antagonistic. One hears warnings like the following: If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? If everything is text, what about violence and bodily injury? Does anything matter in or for poststructuralism? (Butler 28)

Tit. allows some answers to these questions by means of bodies maimed onstage by language, since words achieve injuring material power enough to be realised violently notwithstanding its dramatic, i.e. artificial, status. The palpable aspect of this turns out to be the representation of bodies unable to talk with their severed parts made into props, the cultural materiality of it being one of exchange value observed, for instance, when Titus trades his hand for the heads of two of his killed sons: "For that good hand thou sent'st the Emperor. / Here are the heads of thy two noble sons, / And here's thy hand in scorn to thee sent back" (3.1 233-36). This also goes against Belsey's linearity alongside Butler's agreement with it, as follows:

The body posited as prior to the sign, [sic] is always posited or signified as prior. This signification produces as an effect of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which precedes its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might ever argue

performative, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that is then claims to find prior to any and all signification. (Butler 28)

The body is not before or after the sign in *Tit.*, but confusingly performed together with it on the brink of full representation, which, being impossible, shows itself in the simultaneity of its multiple, yet partial, occurrences. All of this is ultimately representational, for artistry and aesthetic elements – otherwise called dramatic mimesis – are what allow the incapable bodies to come into existence through violence. It is, therefore, mimetic, representational and performative notwithstanding its incompleteness, for the unity is only deceitfully forthcoming for its full realisation remains impossible, which makes of it a forever-lost unity. R. Weiman's following assertions manage to relate representation with performance and difference:

Shakespeare's theater appears to sustain a multiplicity of social and cultural functions in the light of which principles of homogeneity, 'closure', and authority in representation are constantly undermined and subverted. If 'representation' is said to homogenize textual production, stabilize hierarchies and privileges (and so void the text of contradictions and interrogations), the, indeed, dramatic representations of Shakespeare may well be shown not to exhaust their mimetic potential under these modes of closure and plenitude. On the contrary, although the specular reading or viewing of the plays can of course fix the reader or viewer in the plenitude of some false consciousness, there is ample evidence that, over and beyond its stabilizing functions, Shakespearean mimesis comprehends a self-conscious subversion of authority in representation. (276-77)

This shed light on the broader manifestations that Shakespeare's lost unity underlies in a cultural environment thriving with diversity, otherness, heterogeneity and, above all, ceaseless questioning amid the textual, dramatic and performance elements of his plays. A manifest break in the monolithic unity of gender, sex, and race towards a diversified and multiple view of reality in its flux, in which the external characteristics of a given individual are performed while he or she socially enacts his or her veiled human essence.

The fashionable response to that has been attributed to the creation of multiplicity and difference in its appropriation of Shakespearean plays,

instead of the fragmentary features that have always been an inner part of them. Theory is newly challenged therefore in more practical ways than those shown above in their troubling performative and identity approaches, such as Belsey's and Butler's. In contemporary (mostly filmic, but also theatrical) adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, critics have treacherously tended to look for viewpoints developed by a director's re-readings of them to which they oppose the Shakespearean plots themselves as some sort of old-fashioned environment of inequality.

Thus, "situating the play in its prefeminist critique," argues Marianne Novy in one of her studies of Shakespeare, "opens up space for the director and her actors, as well as for spectators, to perform a cultural materialist, or materialist feminist critique" (15), whereby they are useful "to interrogate structures of hierarchy, especially those concerning gender and class relations, in a prevailing masculine culture" (15). The uses a play can have to director and actors who put it onstage are obviously manifold and open to their wishes, besides boundless in their possibilities, and Shakespeare's diversity of plots and characters is quite favourable to that. Novy's words make clear the tendency to assume that contemporary minority views can make use of Shakespeare to make themselves visible through his plays, rather than just highlighting aspects recurring in the Shakespearean texts themselves, which are diverse and fragmentary.

Following this trend, critics and even ordinary viewers often debate about a particular director's choice in turning Shylock less "evil," as though it were only a choice due to adaptations of the text, whereas it indeed lies within the Shakespearean balance of (ine)qualities. For instance, Antonio has devilish traits in his tenacity to make Shylock give up his religion, whereas the Jew shows his humane side, averse to financial gain, by preferring, in act 3, scene 1 (112-15), a cheap ring ("my turquoise"), an erstwhile token of love, to a "wilderness of monkeys" financially profitable to colonists eyes. In both cases, performance, even at its freest, finds in Shakespearean characters' performative identity a conflicting diversity.

The feminism of which Novy's study is a sample is close to queer theory as both tend to see a binary condition in Shakespearean plays. It is at this aspect that Bruce R. Smith aims as he addresses his critique of theory by stating that, "in fixing attention on the semiotic process of meaning-making, queer theory runs the risk of turning women into the

disembodied absences they often occupy in early modern texts” (97).⁶ Lavinia is obviously far from being “disembodied” in her embodiment of physical suffering from realized linguistically violence, while Rosalind and Celia are actually thrice present, just to name some counterposition to Smith’s assertion.

A failed alternative attempt to come to terms with this theoretical conflict is recognising the error of presuming a monolithic unity in Shakespeare, which is in itself a desirable first move towards better readings of the plays. Jerry Brotton’s arguments are quite illustrative of that as he brings about the warn to “critics of the early modern period, in cautioning against accepting the view that the historical logic implied within colonialist discourse is a monolithic entity which comes to shape all subjective and political relationships developed in the activities of travel and commercial expansion from the late fifteenth century onwards” (25). Yet, his piece of writing helps to contextualize arguments in contemporary criticism and, as many of the like, turns out to be nothing more than work in endless progress, or, maybe, a more or less promising agenda short of conclusive evidence, not unlike Annia Loomba’s recognition of potentialities for difference in Shakespeare (164-91).

3. Conclusion

There is a fragmentary element inherent to Shakespeare’s plays. It is mostly visible as parts of a broken ideal unity shown in characters’ conflicts as they fall short of unifying their language (dialogue) and action (plot). Shakespeare himself struggles to deal with the impossibility of such unity between word and things as he attempts to represent it onstage. By doing so, he sets drama as a privileged artistic means of re-enacting the whole (the unreachable unity, which is therefore a lost unity) through its

⁶ Yet, semiotics varies from Eagleton’s “exercise in political semiotics, which tries to locate the relevant history in the very letter of the text” (ix) to K. Elan’s (140-63) notion of pictorial translations of the body, regardless of Shakespeare’s lost unity of body and language.

remaining parts: language and action, which were ideally one and now have become apart.

By applying Butler's identity performance theory, along with elements of Austin's speech act theory which backs it up, these contours of the lost unity entail a second framing that foreshadows fragmentary identities and a constant flux of differences, as observed in Lavinia, Rosalind and Celia, just to name a few. Read against theory, the lost unity leads to problems whose twofold causes can be attributed: 1) to theoretical approaches that deal with unity in Shakespeare by ignoring difference in his text, which happens even to theoreticians (e.g. Novy) concerned with otherness; 2) to theories simply falling short of providing conclusive evidence or satisfactory explanation (e.g. Brotton and Loomba) for the lack of a monolithic unity in Shakespearean plays. Thus, artistically hinted at by Shakespearean characters, the lost unity and its germane performance of difference have defied theory either in studies of aesthetics (Tricomi's, Danson's, Ramalho's) or in studies of the political features of the literary artwork (Eagleton's).

Contemporary theories of language (Austin's) and literature (Butler's and Belsey's) are equally challenged, now with fresh viewpoints and new difficulties, by the simultaneous multiplicity of Shakespearean difference in performance, a great deal of which is due to the non-existence of a monolithic unit in his writing. The present study is conclusive in demonstrating how the Shakespearean challenge of the lost unity defies different theoretical approaches, and how contemporary approaches are newly challenged regarding the performance of differences which, existing since Shakespeare's age, remains puzzling.

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The Challenge of Critical Reflexivity Through a Postmodern Paradox

Fabio Akcelrud Durão

Universidade Estadual de Campinas

The similarities between the latest developments of critical discourse and the logic of fashion are undeniable. This is hardly surprising, given the conditions in which the university system operates, both in developed countries and increasingly so in Brazil. Once the emphasis is placed on quantity and production, once it is agreed, however surreptitiously, that publishing and quality are synonymous (Waters 2004), novelty becomes a value in itself and easily degenerates into newfangledness. What is astounding, however, is the degree to which this *modus operandi* remains unreflected by those who take part in it. Every couple of years new concepts enter the critical arena, are used to exhaustion and silently fall into oblivion, being replaced by newer ones. The 80s was the decade of textuality and deconstruction, which were then closely followed by the body and the poetics of desire; the 90s witnessed the consolidation of identity, hybridity and postcolonialism, while our decade seems to have inaugurated theories of empire. This succession of concepts, and the increasing speed with which they have been introduced, poses a problem for those unwilling to merely utilize them. As tools for thinking such concepts and theories resemble machines and their sheer application in the periphery reproduces patterns of technology importation by undeveloped countries from the advanced center. On the other hand, just ignoring them is equally unsatisfactory, for it obliterates whatever truth content they must have, however minimally, to be viable as concepts. The challenge then is to practice a heightened sense of self-reflexivity, to think at the same time

from theories' concepts but also *through* and *against* them. This is what is attempted below in relation to one important, once path-breaking concept: that of postmodernity.

I

It is not surprising that discourses on postmodernism have aged at an incredibly fast pace, to the point that to some the latter is already an unutterable concept, not primarily due to theoretical shortcomings or inconsistencies, but because it has become purely and simply too boring. And yet, few affects are as productive as boredom. The problem with the postmodern was that it ended up as a victim of its own desire. If it posited a break or a turning away from modernism and modernity, which were themselves responsible for the establishment of a tradition of ruptures, it was because the postmodern saw in the world the abundance of the multiple. Under the most diverse guises, as hybridity or otherness, difference or plurality, discourses on postmodernism believed themselves capable of announcing the overcoming of modern thinking, a kind of rationality characterized by that hunger for domination and control embedded in total planning – as the examples Schönberg's twelve-tone technique and the construction of Brasília attest. In contrast to this, postmodernism promised liberty through endless quotability, collage, montage, and parody, the abolition of the auratic and autonomous work, and the erasure of the division between high- and low-brow cultures. In opposition to elitist aristocratism it offered democratic pluralism.

A fruitful summary of all this can be found in David Harvey's appropriation (43) of I. Hassan's schematic comparison between modernism and postmodernism (here, already, a multiplying practice of citation and iteration). The series of binary oppositions may be viewed as an *ad absurdum* proliferation of an otherwise self-defeating strategy, since dualism is precisely what postmodern theorists want to avoid. The ironic intention becomes thus obvious, the more so because irony itself is one of the categories in the following list, which makes it interestingly self-conscious and self-referential. The series runs:

modernism

romanticism/Symbolism
form (conjunctive, closed)
purpose
design
hierarchy
mastery/logos
art object/ finished work
distance
creation/totalization/synthesis
presence
centering
genre/boundary
semantics
paradigm
hypotaxis
metaphor
selection
root/depth
interpretation/reading
signified
lisible (readerly)
narrative/*grande histoire*
master code
symptom
type
genital/phallic
paranoia
origin/cause
God the Father
metaphysics
determinacy
transcendence

postmodernism

paraphysics/Dadaism
antiform(disjunctive,open)
play
chance
anarchy
exhaustion/silence
process/performance/happening
participation
decreation/deconstruction/antithesis
absence
dispersal
text/intertext
rhetoric
syntagm
parataxis
metonymy
combination
rhizome/surface
against interpretation/misreading
signifier
scriptable (writerly)
anti-narrative/*petite histoire*
idiolect
desire
mutant
polymorphous/androgynous
schizophrenia
difference/difference/trace
The Holy Ghost
irony
indeterminacy
immanence

Included in the list is almost everything one could expect to represent postmodernism, articulated in the most economical and inorganic, that is to say, non-narrative way: not only Derrida, Lyotard, Barthes, Deleuze & Guattari, but also linguistics, logics, psychoanalysis, literary theory and theology – all of them put together without any hierarchy or anteriority, democratically and eclectically merely listed: parataxis instead of hypotaxis. The result is an agglomerate that bespeaks completeness

without incurring in totalization, an infinite potential for differentiation, instead of that necessary imposition of boundaries that stands as a precondition for any idea of wholeness. However, for all its multidimensionality and disseminating character, or, rather, precisely because of it, this list eventually solidifies in and insists on one fluctuating seme, a common denominator in one way or another belonging to all terms, and which would make itself present in any other ones that could follow, namely that of “excess.” Unmistakably and unavoidably, under the most different guises, inspirations and tendencies, postmodern rhetoric is one of *abundance*.¹

As a regulating idea or insurmountable postmodern horizon, abundance is most clearly present in those introductory texts that intend to divulge the postmodern – interestingly enough themselves more abundant (i.e. to be found in the market in greater quantities) than the “primary” or “original” sources. Wolfgang Iser’s *Ästhetisches Denken* is exemplary in this sense. Throughout the book’s seven essays we are reminded that “Today’s society is no uniform troops, but resembles a loose network of heterogeneous forms. This is its reality at the same time that it marks an ideal” (75). In Iser’s view, as that which is most essential and characteristic to reality, multiplicity is immediately accessible in the world. All that needs to be done is for this heterogeneity to be apprehended by the critic and written down in what Iser calls aesthetic thinking (41-78). This kind of availability and lack of mediation generates an interesting dualism in the book regarding two kinds of propositions, those which refer to the object discussed (architecture, design, commercials etc.), and those which divulge its multiplicity; as a result, the text’s weakness comes from the eventual supremacy of the latter (abstract) over the former (concrete). The word “abundance” is anything but abundant; imputations of inexhaustibility do not suffice to change the truth that the object (visual, urban, aural or otherwise) cannot fulfill all of the critic’s desires, but must contain lacks in itself. It is precisely through the repression of scarcity and need in postmodern discourse that it so easily fell prey to a dialectics of novelty

¹ Thus, in literature we are told that: “Postmodern stylistics is a stylistics of excess; the text is *too* rich, the surface *too* lush, the prose *too* joyous. Postmodern stylistics is altogether *too* too” (Dettmar 49).

versus sameness.² It is not only the case that one could always argue from the other side, showing, for instance, that the core of what exists is not difference but unheard-of homogenization. Marxists do have a point when they stress that all history so far has been a pre-history of mankind.³ For instance: never before was the totality of things to be bought so huge, never before was it so easy to travel and avoid real otherness. Following the general tendency in the world of business, which, as Marx long ago foresaw, has led to ever-greater concentration of capitals, to mergers and to the establishment of mega-transnational corporations, the culture industry has neutralized competition as a driving force of change and now manages to impose its own pasteurized version of sameness everywhere in the globe. But one could go one step further. It is fair to argue that the standardized side of mass production invaded postmodern theories themselves. Just as any other artifact on the market, discourses on the postmodern were overproduced and very quickly degenerated into slogan brandishing and name dropping; due to the sheer repetitiveness of postmodernist dicta in the most dissimilar contexts and disciplines (multiplicity badly multiplied) the postmodern itself started to belong to the category it at all costs tried to evade: it became boring.

Still, and this is the other side of the question, there are cases in which a turn to the different, to what is other or new, rather than being merely postulated, is in fact demonstrated. As an example one could mention Adorno's short text "The Art and the Arts,"⁴ where he works out the thesis of an aesthetic "in-fringe-ment" (in German *Verfransung*⁵). In a nutshell, Adorno coins this concept to account for a process whereby the

² No one dealt with this in a more thorough fashion than T.W. Adorno (see, e.g., "Über Statik", 217-37).

³ Recently, this argument has been most forcefully worked out by Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981).

⁴ "Die Kunst und die Künste" (432-53).

⁵ The concept first appeared in English as "transgression," which is clearly an unsatisfactory translation. "Franse" in German is thread or fringe, which makes "infringement" particularly adequate. See Hauke Brunkhorst (43-61). A good discussion of this theme can be found in Christine Eichel's informative work (1993).

arts start to converge into one another, thus leaving behind their assigned places, their ordering in traditional aesthetics (e.g. in Hegel's, where to each genre a pigeonhole is allotted according to its participation in the Idea), in order to form a new kind of unity. Gyorgy Ligeti's "Atmospheres," for instance, does not contain melodies anymore, but presents sheer masses of sound constantly changing in tone, pitch, timbre and volume. Music here starts to look like painting, in that its temporal dynamic loses terrain to the color of sound. The reverse happens to painting, for once a picture starts to make use of several vanishing points, it cannot be apprehended in one single act of perception, but has to be viewed from different perspectives, thus incorporating time within itself. A further elective affinity can be found in painting as it starts to have objects attached to the canvas, which makes it resemble sculpture, and sculpture, as in Richard Serra's amazing pieces now displayed at New York's MoMa, flirts with architecture. As for literature, it begins to adopt seriality, an originally musical technique; conversely, music takes the score ever more seriously and now incorporates in its notation signs that cannot be translated into sound: in the irretrievable residue of the letter it becomes literary. Finally, and most significantly, one could mention architecture's recent tendency to quote different styles in the very same building, which brings a new sense of narrativity into it, thus integrating a new sense of time that "literalizes" it.

This "promiscuity" (Adorno's term) among the branches of art stands in sharp contrast to the avant-gardes, insofar as the latter's programmatic concerns very easily jeopardized artistic quality; the infringement of arts' boundaries, in opposition, has taken place as a spontaneous movement, devoid of immediate theoretical concerns. The knotted arts (*verfrante Künste*) could thus be thought to correspond to a new period in the history of aesthetics, when, revolting against the increasing homogenization of the world, the arts homogenized themselves in a closer unity. What is frustrating about Adorno's text, however, is that this great finding, that the arts have developed to an autonomization of their linguistic aspect (in German, their *Sprachcharakter*), that they are now strangely more unified and imbued of a more similar spirit – this conclusion begs to have a broader name, to be generalized into a broader movement or tendency. Now, among all the more wide-ranging concepts available to us today, the

only satisfactory one, the only one that is capable of signing our time with a proper name is that of the postmodern itself.

Thus the paradox: it is possible to claim that, whenever postmodernism is regarded as an object to be approached, described and judged, whenever it is *announced*, it reverts to its opposite: not novelty, but repetition; not the absolute wow!, but the ever-the-same. On the other hand, in those cases when theoretical discourse manages to produce the unexpected, most of the time unconcerned about postmodern issues (and sometimes even against the postmodern itself⁶), the concept of postmodernity asserts itself unequivocally as the only one fit for a time of incessant and ever-faster change; it thus shows us the emergence of as yet unimagined possibilities. Here, rupture with the modern is not merely posited or taken for granted anymore, but becomes the result of the interpretative process itself, the outcome of its own hermeneutical logic. In sum, this is the paradox of something that ceases to be itself the moment it is invoked, at the same time that it remains the necessary name for that which emerges as an event.

This does not mean, of course, that all works explicitly dealing with postmodern themes or bearing the name as a title are fated from the start to repeat themselves to exhaustion; what it means, rather, is that successful postmodern texts must incorporate in themselves countercurrents to their overt purposes. One may argue, indeed, that this drawing away from themselves, this disjunction or fault line between conscious project and unexpected result is what makes those few interesting books on postmodernism worth reading. Thus, to take a well-known case, Fredric Jameson's own *Postmodernism* (1991) could very easily miscarry in its idea of a new phase in capitalism's history, for the very thought structure underlying the book, the historical homology between kinds of representation and broad, social-economic forms, is irredeemably simplifying in nature. Nevertheless, working against the grain of this framework the reader finds in the text truly breathtaking analyses of cultural artifacts belonging to the most different spheres, including painting, film, video, architecture,

⁶This is the case of Compaignon's *Les cinq paradoxes de la modernité*, which tries to contain the postmodern in a chapter, but as Jameson (1998) observes, eventually becomes an interesting example of postmodern discourse in its own right.

Theory, linguistics and economics. These do not summon up the concept of the postmodern but produce it; naming becomes now a more relative and mediated process, inasmuch as it emerges at the end as something not in perfect agreement with what it was at the beginning: the postmodern is here what it has become.⁷

II

This puzzling paradox is not an autonomous cultural phenomenon, but is grounded on the peculiar situation of today's hermeneutical technologies and their places of enunciation; this is a question which, in short, involves the means of production of meaning. Here we touch on the complicated, reciprocally determining relationship between postmodernism and Theory: for if the latter is perhaps the most typical product of the former, postmodernism can be viewed as a theory in its own right, one that has to share the general intellectual space with other ones. And since it is impossible to determine in this case which is inside which, it is only logical to posit that postmodernism's peculiar situation extends into that of Theory. In fact, the same problematic involving the abundance of multiplicity can also be found here. On the one hand, there was never before so much meaning available, so much potential for the creation of sense. Today's Theory is characterized by the immense gamut of interpretative master codes at its disposal (from traditional phenomenology, hermeneutics, and semiology, through Freud and Lacan, to Foucault, Cultural Studies, Queer

⁷This structural non-coincidence between project and result, method and reading, is to be found at the core of Derrida's texts, themselves widely regarded as affiliated to postmodernism. What makes secondary literature on deconstruction in general so unbearably uninventive is embedded in what the genre "secondary literature" implies: clarification, explanation, discussion, exemplification. In opposition to this, Derrida's texts very self-consciously construct the contexts they work from, with and against. In this sense, all of Derrida's mannerisms, his rhetorical questions, neologisms, interruptions and detours, his interweaving of highly contrasting topics and works in the same exposition represent the very core of his philosophy, and not those overt, pseudo-avant-garde slogans such as "metaphysics of presence," "il n'y a pas du hors texte" and the like.

Theory, Marxism, feminism, deconstruction, etc). These theoretical currents are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they may be combined in interesting hybrid theories, thus making for partial non-totalizing totalization. The same holds true to Theory's objects: they also have lost any a priori determination. Accompanying the belated historical weakening of religion and the slacking of moral codes in literary theory (the precursor of today's Theory),⁸ the conditions were created under which anything let itself be interpreted – from the history of obesity to the writing of the railroad systems, from the semiotics of reptiles to the sexuality of ties. If literary theory could still be taken to encompass a field, however problematically, Theory now resembles nothing so much as the structure of a nebula.

And yet, never before was reality so resistant to the production of meaning, not because of any traditional limiting element, not because of censorship or impositions from the “outside,” but due to its sheer economic monopolization. As postmodernism's closest relative, Theory both feeds on, and is limited by, this state of affairs. When it forgets the boundaries that frame its loci of enunciation, the university, the academic journal, circles of intellectuals, and purports to describe reality as such, it enters in contradiction with itself, generating the same impoverishing results mentioned above regarding postmodernism. When it plunges in reality, forgetting itself and taking from it the potentials that lie dormant there, it then becomes worthy of its own name by not mentioning it. The dilemma is then what to do with this overall paradox, which is common to Theory as a postmodern phenomenon and to postmodernism as a theoretical stance: a *Zeitgeist* that can only be true to itself by its own self-obliteration, a reality that desperately begs to become what it was promised to be – as if things could be seen from two perspectives, or had two faces, depending on how and from where one deals with them: theoretical entities full of meaning, or humdrum, everyday objects of monotony. The answer is surely not found by overlooking one of the poles in this force field, neither

⁸ It is always astounding to remember that, under New Criticism, no longer than thirty years ago, literary studies in both England and the United States were still fundamentally moral in character and represented, however feebly, surrogates to religion.

in the celebration of abundance, which forgets the drudgery of daily routine and the repetition of society's reproduction, nor in the denial of change, which refuses to see what is happening before our own eyes.

Indeed, one is tempted here to adopt the old Marxist opposition and interpret this overall situation as involving a contradiction between the forces and relations of production of meaning. Interpretative codes want to break away from its academic fetters and meet what lies outside;⁹ doing this they would awaken a new potential for meaning in the objects themselves, which would be utterly transformed. Constructing real plurality would mean nothing less and redeeming things in the world to an apotheosis of sense, something not unlike Ernst Bloch's idea of a concrete utopia, which he sees inhabiting the very materiality of things. On the other hand, the academic space works both to foster and seclude its products. Foster, because the academy, just like any other capitalist enterprise, has to motivate an increasing and incessant production of meaning, at ever-shorter turnovers: the theoretical fashions. This applies to all kinds of propositions that can be made inside the university and its affiliated circles, including self-criticisms and denunciations, iconoclasm and different kinds of negation, anti-interpretative gestures, and perhaps even this paper. Seclude, because as a whole the academy is complicit with the system that wants to tame and restrict meaning. It therefore makes sure that what is produced inside it remains accessible only to the few who can afford it. This, the university apparatus can easily achieve by means of the star-system it encourages among professors, as well as by the promotion of different forms of symbolic capital, not to mention the safeguarding of its products through copyright and the like. The postmodern could only

⁹ It is interesting to observe that a good deal of what was most innovative and exciting in recent Theory originated in movements outside the academy, or at least in tension with it. So it is that structuralism, as well as its "post", had ties, albeit tenuous ones, with the French avant-garde around the *Tel Quel* group. Or, in another significant example, one could think of the theological influence on the Frankfurt School, which was mediated by Jewish Youth groups and so strongly marked authors such as Benjamin, Bloch, Horkheimer and Adorno. A different kind of exteriority, finally, can be found in the more recent post-colonial studies, which to a great extent rely on the experience of scholars from the periphery of capitalism.

be true to its own desire under different conditions of production of meaning. But this is a political question, no longer a theoretical one, that depends on the radical democratization of the production of meaning and its institutions. What we can do in theory is holding tight, in the same space, the two opposites described above. In other words, what is needed is a kind of writing that does not surrender to the lure of immediate abundance, nor stubbornly clings to the continuation of old misery, but which is capable of exhibiting their belonging together in tension: a kind of writing that, by denying a hasty reconciliation, maintains open the new or different that was always there.

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Postmodern Fiction Challenges: Reevaluating the Vietnam War and the War on Terror

Giséle Manganelli Fernandes

Universidade Estadual Paulista - São José do Rio Preto

The relationship between Literature and History is a crucial aspect to be debated in postmodern American fiction. The notion that History is also “a form of fiction,” according to Hayden White, has raised considerable uncertainty about the “truth” in official historical accounts (*Tropics* 122). Literature, then, offers an advantageous opportunity to discuss and present new approaches to past events, from a different standpoint. Through their writings, authors Don DeLillo, Tim O’Brien, and Jonathan Safran Foer show their concern with the records of U.S. History, since trying to reassess some of the “truths” that were imposed on people throughout the years has become a topic of supreme importance.

What is “truth”? Will we ever be able to know it? Postmodern fiction has presented this subject in a very intense manner, boldly opposing the belief that we can have the “truth” in a total, closed form. Writers have provided multiple approaches to official History, once regarded as definite, by bringing forth the voices of groups marginalized in the past, and whose histories were ignored. In this sense, those novels to which Linda Hutcheon’s concept of “historiographic metafiction” can be applied have allowed the reader to revisit a certain historical period with a broader and more critical view. Hutcheon states that,

as we have been seeing in historiographic metafiction as well, we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many

as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men. (*Politics* 66)

Hutcheon also observes that there is not one truth, but “*truths* in the plural” (*Poetics* 109), and the writers studied in this paper intend to make their readers conscious of this state of affairs.

In order to express that the belief in only one truth is unacceptable, the techniques used by DeLillo, O’Brien, and Foer produce challenging texts to be analyzed. There is a mixture of voices, of points of view, and the innovations in the form of graphic experimentations make the readers feel responsible for establishing the relationships among the various parts of the work, as they ultimately realize that the narratives are not restricted to one interpretation. In his essay “The Power of History,” Don DeLillo reinforces the argument that we need fiction to understand what was concealed by History: “The past is great and deep. It can make a writer expansive, open him to perspectives and emotions that his own narrower environment has failed to elicit” (63). The narratives are rapid in movement, in an apparent state of confusion. This fosters in the readers a very active attitude towards the texts, which will enable them to follow the development of the story and to construct meaning(s).

Tim O’Brien is a veteran of the Vietnam War and wrote many works about the event, but through the perspective of the soldiers, those who were really walking in the mud, who had to deal with all sorts of troubles and were unable to escape from the traps prepared by the Viet Congs. This part of the paper focuses on *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box me up and Ship me Home*, published in 1975, and aims at presenting some of the issues addressed by O’Brien that show the lack of purpose in that war.

Despite the fact that Tobey Herzog does regard *If I Die in a Combat Zone* as an autobiography, I chose not to follow this path in my study, but rather to examine it as a revision of that historical period. Thus, in this paper, the “I” that appears in the narrative is a fictional narrator and character called O’Brien, who was drafted in 1968. Herzog, when analyzing the narrator in O’Brien’s novel *The Things They Carried*, published in 1990, inquires whether some of the stories told in the book are “based on the war experiences of soldier O’Brien or on war stories he heard in Vietnam” (900). Moreover, he points out that although Tim O’Brien

denies being the narrator of the book, readers are curious to know why he used “the Tim O’Brien name for his narrator.” The author’s answer is that he was writing the book and “found his name appearing” (900). Those issues can also be applied to *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, since the texture of the book is an interweaving of fact and fiction.

As the narrative unfolds, readers get to know the contradictions of the war. The various short stories that make up the book expose how that war was incorrectly judged. The narrator points out that: “The war, I thought, was wrongly conceived and poorly justified. But perhaps I was mistaken, and who really knew, anyway?” (*If I Die in a Combat Zone* 18) What was right? What was wrong? The notions of good and evil are always present in the narrative (“I declared the war evil” [20]), but it becomes clear to the narrator that he has no choice other than going to Vietnam. A decision such as fleeing to Canada would make him a coward in the eyes of his townspeople, who hardly gave any thought as to why Americans were in Vietnam. According to their point of view, the explanation was plain and unquestionable: the U.S. had to fight the evil communists. Thus, there is no question about to what extent people really understood the actual reasons for the troops to be in Vietnam.

The fabrication of “the truth,” “the right thing to do,” is based upon reasons that may not be plausible. Whether the war was right or wrong, it would not make any difference to those people, as readers learn in the passages that describe the narrator’s hometown. He explains that he grew up between wars, being thus a product of a generation of baby-boomers. His town was a place for “wage earners today – not very spirited people, not very thoughtful people” (13), and in that place there was no argument against the Second World War: “Nothing to do with causes or reason; the war was right, they muttered, and had to be fought” (13). As far as Vietnam was concerned, their reaction could not be different, and what causes alarm is the situation that by refusing to think about the causes of the war, people simply accepted the version given by the government and the military. The soldiers, though, had to face a different reality.

According to Kaplan,

First the United States decided what constituted good and evil, right and wrong, civilized and uncivilized, freedom and oppression for Vietnam, according to American standards . . . For the U.S. military

and government, the Vietnam that they had in effect invented became fact. For the soldiers that the government then sent there however, the facts that their government had created about who was the enemy, what were the issues, and how the war was to be won were quickly overshadowed by a world of uncertainty. (43)

The moments of horror that the soldiers had to go through make the reader think about what true heroism is. Is it an act of heroism going to a war and dying? Before leaving for Vietnam, the narrator O'Brien heard contrasting views on the matter: "No war is worth losing your life for," a college acquaintance used to argue. . . . But others argued that no war is worth losing your country for, and when asked about the case when a country fights a wrong war, those people just shrugged" (21). Should those drafted defend the country, even though they think the war is wrong? The narrator did not understand the reason for fighting that war, but went to Vietnam.

The narrator explains that in the previous year, 1967, he was studying in Prague, and he describes "an evening in July of 1967" (94) when he was having a beer with a student from Czechoslovakia, whose roommate was from North Vietnam. The Czech student introduced him to Li, who studied Economics and was a lieutenant in the North Vietnamese Army. They talked about the war, and Li stated that the American President, Johnson, "was misguided and wrong," and that he did not see the North Vietnamese as aggressors in that war; on the contrary, they were just "defending Vietnam from American aggression" (95). This passage contributes to show that there are always at least two possibilities of evaluating a fact, and depending on the source, one can know the historical past through a certain bias. In the case of a war, it is also important to take into account the economic interests of groups to whom an armed conflict may bring financial gain.

He goes to Vietnam in 1968 and describes scenes from his arrival there ("First there is some mist. Then, when the plane begins its descent, there are pale gray mountains" [69]) up to the moment when he gets back to the United States. Throughout the book, the narrator reveals his suffering, his agony. The soldiers had to walk in the rain, in the forests, blowing up tunnels, waiting for the enemy to appear suddenly. Some died in unbelievable ways. In one passage, when they bombed shelters, one piece of clay sliced

off a man's nose and he died; others hit mines and their lives were over; others lost their legs. When the soldiers had to send out an ambush, they were afraid of "getting lost, of becoming detached from the others, of spending the night alone in that frightening and haunted countryside" (87). The narrative shows that the military were left without any definite plan or direction, they were scared: "It is sad when you learn you're not much of a hero" (146). How can one identify a brave man? "Grace under pressure, Hemingway would say" (146), as the narrator points out. Is this sufficient? The narrator does not agree with Hemingway's position, and the question remains: What is a hero after all?

To show their power (or insanity?), American soldiers are cruel to civilians, by making old men prisoners and beating them, by provoking massacres, as it had happened in My Lai the year before O'Brien was there, by mistreating a blind old man. This blind old farmer was helping soldiers to shower with water from his well, but one of the soldiers flushed milk in the man's face and it sprayed into his cataracts. There was a mixture of milk and blood that he tried to reach by moving his tongue. Then, he continued to catch water from the well with a bucket to shower the other soldier. None of these happenings make evident any courage, but only cowardice; moreover, they disclose one of the most dangerous problems they had in Vietnam, that is, lack of management, of purpose. At a certain moment, the soldiers did not know what they were in Vietnam for, and took it out on innocent civilians.

When speaking about the massacre in My Lai, Major Callicles explains that the bomber pilot knows he is going to kill civilians, even though he may not see them: "so he just flies out and drops his load and flies back, gets a beer, and sees a movie" (194). It seems simple, but, in reality, this pilot will never forget that he caused the deaths of so many people who had not done anything wrong. It is not only a matter of war and peace, of right or wrong. It is a moral question that is addressed in this narrative. As Hayden White aptly queries, "Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?" ("The Value" 25).

History is thoroughly debated in the novel, and one of these moments of intense debate happens when O'Brien engages in a discussion with Chaplain Edwards, who is also an officer, a Captain. In this dialogue on war and faith, the reader starts asking him or herself whose side of the

war is portrayed in the official reports. It is obvious that O'Brien and Edwards have opposing views, have different versions of the facts, such as their views about the Spanish-American war. According to the Captain, the Lord had moved President McKinley to go to that war, which for O'Brien, is "McKinley's history," and argues that wars are decided in "man's intellect" (59).

O'Brien also explains that he could not see any evidence that "the lives being lost, the children napalmed and everything" would be "worth preventing a change from Thieu to Ho Chi Minh" (60). Captain Edwards states that going to Vietnam is "a fine, heroic moment for American soldiers" (60). This idea of heroism was not sufficiently strong to convince O'Brien that the combat in Vietnam was right. The real situation is that O'Brien could not find motives which would make him support that war. He could understand people fighting Hitler, they had reasons for that, he thought; however, in his opinion, the conflict in Vietnam was "a war fought for uncertain reasons" (138). The topic developed throughout the book shows that the Vietnam War was an enormous mistake.

Tim O'Brien is known for his journalistic-fictional style, being in that regard compared to Ernest Hemingway, since their descriptions, even the most violent ones, do not arouse high emotions. In the novel, Private O'Brien remarks that Hemingway and Pyle wrote about war, without discussing whether it was right or wrong. He recalls one story by Hemingway about the Second World War and is not able to understand the fact that "he did not care to talk about the thoughts those men must have had" (93). However, the objective Tim O'Brien has with his writings is to show the soldiers' point of view: their suffering, anguish, and the sequels, either physical or psychological, or even both, that they have to carry for the rest of their lives.

Private O'Brien gets a job as a typist in battalion headquarters and finally leaves for the United States. He was determined "to write about the army" (93) after his time in Vietnam was over. In so doing, he would then be able to reveal the cruelty of wars. When the narrator got back to his country, he could take his uniform off on the plane. However, he did not have "civilian shoes," and states that "It's impossible to go home barefoot" (209). By not going home barefoot, it becomes clear that he will not be able to be the same man he was before going to Vietnam; he will always

carry the marks of the war, and the image that he had of his own land had changed. Hence, he knew that it was dangerous to walk barefoot on that soil.

By telling war stories, O'Brien can review those moments, making people rethink the purposes of violent acts, and discuss whether the country should fight a war or not, at the expense of innocent lives: "Now, war ended, all I am left with are simple, unprofound scraps of truth" (23). The message is that we will never know the whole truth. This representation of History in fiction is a way to indicate that the truth is what the reader believes it to be. Consequently, there is never a closure.

After September 11, another war began: the "war on terror," which led to the pre-emptive war against Iraq. Will this conflict become a tragic repetition of the Vietnam War? In order to comment on the 9/11 terrorist attacks, two texts are worth discussing here: "In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September" (2001), by Don DeLillo, and *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), by Jonathan Safran Foer. "Terror's response is a narrative that has been developing over the years, only now becoming inescapable" (33), DeLillo argues in his text. In fact, DeLillo became aware of the fact that the environment for terror had been present in America for a long time. Since the 1970s DeLillo has been addressing this issue in his texts, and on 9/11 it became a catastrophic reality.

Astonishingly, the terrorist attacked a way of living in which he had taken part: "Years here, waiting, taking flying lessons, making the routine gestures of community and home, the credit card, the bank account, the post-office box" (34). Even after living in this environment, the terrorist did not change his mind. He had an objective, he was conscious of what he wanted to destroy, since: "He knows who we are and what we mean in the world – an idea, a righteous fever in the brain" (34). As Marco Abel states,

Thus, DeLillo's narrative intimates, the dialectic of recognition that permeates public debates of 9/11 does not hold as an explanatory apparatus, because the other does not even acknowledge – is not capable of acknowledging – our self. The other bypasses us. (1242)

DeLillo states that "Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists" (33). Those men moved violently against U.S. modernity, without a clear understanding of American society. DeLillo also presents

some reasons for the anger of those terrorists and their attitude towards the United States: "We are rich, privileged, and strong, but they are willing to die" (34). Those men do believe that they are fighting for a cause. If, in the past, communism was terrifying, now terror has other agents, and the opposition Us versus Them still holds: "The sense of disarticulation we hear in the term "Us and Them" has never been so striking, at either end" (34).

The narrator depicts the scene in which there are photographs of missing people and the objects lost in the ruins of the towers: "The cell phones, the lost shoes . . . status reports, résumés, insurance forms" (35). The city was in chaos after the attacks, and the narrative reveals this situation through the techniques employed by the author. The main passage that represents this extremely confusing moment is when the narrative in essay form is suddenly interrupted and changes completely to a fictional style in order to address the stories of Karen and Marc, affected by the tragedy: "Something is happening" (36), Marc says. Cell phones did not work, there was ash everywhere, and people were running in the street. Karen thought that smoke was going to kill them and Marc thought that the crush of buildings could be the real danger.

The point of view changes constantly to show that people were trying to understand that occurrence, and what could happen to them: "Mark came back out to the corridor. I think we *might* die, he told himself, hedging his sense of what would happen next"; "When the second tower fell, my heart fell with it. I called Marc, who is my nephew, on his cordless" (37). When they left the building, "They came out into a world of ash and near night" (37). This is the moment that allows the reader to verify that there is destruction and a total state of confusion. People found shelter at Pace University and when they were offered food, somebody said "I don't want cheese on that."; "I like it better not so cooked" (37). Such comments can be taken as a sign that they were willing to lead their normal lives again.

This whole section works as if a director of a movie wanted to show a quick scene of the tragedy and then the reader is taken back to the previous form of narrative, to continue the discussion of the reasons for the attacks. DeLillo points out that there is the technological advancement of the United States, a nation that "is comfortable with the future" (39), in opposition to those terrorists, "who want to bring back the past" (34). The author shows that the 9/11 attacks have brought new challenges to

the Western civilization, since terrorists are able to accomplish their aims by using methods that can destroy any place in an unexpected way, including biological and chemical weapons, and that is why they want to establish the rules of the war. However, some questions remain unanswered: Who are the real enemies? Where are they? Are the pre-emptive attacks the best option to fight terrorism?

Undoubtedly, the author uses the very course of writing to try to understand why the attacks happened. It is also a healing process. Some people did not even believe that they were watching a real fact on TV: "It was bright and totalizing, and some of us said it was unreal" (38). However, the world had to face the shocking reality that the Twin Towers fell and there was the terror of "People falling from the towers hand in hand" (39). What is left is language, this powerful instrument, and the writer uses to attempt to recreate all the suffering those people went through and describe his personal view on the matter. DeLillo's most recent novel, *Falling Man*, published in 2007, discusses 9/11 through the lives of people who survived the attacks and focuses on the terrorists who were going to destroy the World Trade Center.

In spite of September 11, New York continues to be the destination of immigrants from all over the world, and there they lead their lives, practicing their religions (as the narrator saw an Islamic woman on a prayer rug on Canal Street, one month before the attacks), speaking their mother tongues, bringing their contribution to the culture of the United States. The skyline in New York has changed, but America has not and will not.

Jonathan Safran Foer's work also focuses on 9/11. The main character Oskar, whose father died in the attack to the World Trade Center, finds a key in an envelope in his father's closet, amidst pieces of a vase he had broken. On the back of the envelope, the word "Black" is written, and he decides to find the right lock for that key. In a city like New York, he calculates that it would take him about "three years to go through all of them [the locks]" (51).

Oskar's journey pushes the novel forward. While the reader is introduced to the characters and exposed to the aftermath of 9/11, the novel also reveals the five messages that his father, Thomas Schell, had left in the answering machine when the terrorist act happened. They are scattered throughout the novel, on pages 14, 69, 168, 207, and 280. In

these messages, one notices a progression from the moment when people had no idea of what was going on (“*Listen, something’s happened*” [message #1, 14]), to the hopes of that the firemen would be able to rescue them (“*I’ll call again in a few minutes. Hopefully the firemen will be. Up here by then.*” [message #2, 69]), their trying to escape through the roof (“*I’m underneath a table. Hello? Sorry. I have a wet napkin wrapped around my face. [...] People are getting crazy. There’s a helicopter circling around, and. I think we’re going to go up onto the roof.*” [message # 4, 207]), up to the moment when the character’s father is about to die:

MESSAGE FIVE.

10:04 A.M. IT’S DA	S DAD. HEL	S DAD. KNOW IF [...]
SORRY	HEAR ME	MUCH
HAPPENS,	REMEMBER – (280)	

The narrative technique conveys all the anguish of the final moments of those people’s lives. A mixture of fear and dread pervades the talking and it all starts with the “something is happening” up to the end of all hopes. Thomas is probably trying to say how much he loves his family, a last message of encouragement regardless of what happens. Schell’s family buried an empty coffin. The narrative shows his life coming to an end without any logical reason.

Experimentation with language is an outstanding feature in the book and, through an innovative way of writing, Foer intermingles narrative, photos of diverse sources, blank pages, pages with only one sentence, pages painted with different colors, italics, block letters, and pages in which the reader cannot read anything because they appear to have been overtyped. This fragmentation challenges the reader to try to understand who is speaking and make connections between the pictures and the narrative. One of the most striking sequences of photos is the one which portrays a person jumping out of the window of the WTC to death. Actually, the readers are given different perspectives, since they may see a body either descending or ascending. If the first option is chosen, the readers only view death; if the second one is selected, there is the chance to review History and prepare a different future. And the last option is what O’Brien, DeLillo, and Foer propose in their texts.

According to Noam Chomsky, if the people of the Western world want to have peace, they must be willing to “examine what lies behind the atrocities” (81) in order to be able to understand acts such as the attacks of September 11, and know how to react so as to avoid more violence. For this reason, the greatest challenge we have to face now is to be ready to deal with “Them” not only thinking about “Us.”

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Postmodern Challenges In Alice Munro's Short Fiction: Issues of Language and Representation

José dos Santos

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

One of the features of Alice Munro's fiction is that it has challenged and resisted, at various levels, traditional literary taxonomies. Due to the descriptive style of her narratives as well as faithful representation of events, places and rural communities, many critics have placed her short stories within the tradition of literary realism. A glance over her work certainly invites this sort of classification. Most of her stories have the rural and semi-rural landscape of Ontario, Canada as the background. Usually set in small towns, her characters deal with personal conflicts, love relationships, and various kinds of family issues. On the formal level, her narrators usually know exactly what is happening before, during, and after the events being narrated. Munro herself admits to be fascinated with careful descriptions of places and characters. In a comment on this aspect of her fiction, she states: "I always have to know my characters in a lot of depth – what clothes they'd choose, what they were like at school, etc... And I know what happened before and what will happen after the part of their lives I'm dealing with" ("A Conversation"). In another interview she reiterates this comment on the mimetic aspect of her stories: "I'm very, very excited by what you might call the surface of life... It seems to me very important to be able to get the exact tone and texture of how things are" (qtd. in Hoy 100).

Yet, despite this representational aspect of her fiction, what many recent critics have perceived is that one cannot easily classify her production as realist. Bharati Mukherjee, for instance, in a review for *The New York*

Times of her collection entitled *Friend of my Youth* (1990) states that while Munro employs many strategies of realist fiction, she, in many ways, has “deepened the channels of realism” (31). Others such as George Woodcock have gone as far as classifying her fiction as “magical realism” (236). Although some might feel reluctant to place Munro’s fiction within the category of postmodernist fiction (she does seem to be experimental enough), quite a few have stressed several elements indicating that even though on the surface she apparently adheres to mimetic models of reality, in another level, she subverts the very strategies she employs. This view is discussed by Lorraine M. York in an insightful essay in which she investigates how Munro incorporates in her stories several theories of photography. This resource, York states, allows Munro to combine in one scene or take elements naturally opposed such as truth and illusion, fact and fiction, the strange and the familiar (52). Hers is a narrative then where borders are blurred rather than made distinct.

Along with York, Mark Nunes stresses another postmodern feature of Munro’s fiction: her perception of language as an agent of mediation rather than representation. Although her fiction is not highly experimental as many of her contemporaries, he suggests, postmodern characteristics come about in the way she structures her stories and deals with the characters’ dilemmas. Basing his analysis on the examination of stories published in *Friend of my Youth*, he argues that Munro privileges disconnected realities and, in the process, the role of language in putting all the pieces together. This arrangement, always subject to context, takes the form of a narrative constantly open to additions and deletions. Hers is an aesthetic then of contingent arrangements, or, in Nunes’s words, “an aesthetic of piecing, allowing familiar and stable narratives to reveal their condition and contingent nature” (20). Coral Ann Howells corroborates this postmodernist perception of Munro’s fiction, namely, her ability to create something and later disarrange it so as to suggest the temporal, contextual, fleeing nature of reality. She remarks: “There is always something in addition which disarranges any fictional structure, however carefully it is created” (87). Through an aesthetics called by Ajay Heble as “discourse of potential and absent meanings” (7), the reader is caught up in a semiotic web where signs do not lead to a final interpretant, but to other signs and various possible readings. If meaning is indeterminate and mimetic representation no

longer possible, Munro places reality then in the realm of language and narrativization, that is, all one can expect are attempts at putting a whole together.

It is as narratives challenging representational or mimetic conceptions of reality that this essay will analyze two short stories by Alice Munro: "Meneseutung" (1988) and "Runway" (2003).¹ What one notices in these narratives is a tension – present, in fact, in most of her stories but more salient this time² – between representational models of reality and an apparent skepticism towards the ability of language to capture the nuances and complexities of human experience. If on the one hand, these texts attempt to put together fragments of a dispersed reality, on the other they suggest that metaphysical, pre-linguistic unities cannot be achieved.

"Meneseutung," published in 1988, is one of the best illustrations of Munro's concern with questions of language and representation. Here, she suggests that reality is not a ready-made entity at the full grasp of an all-knowing subject with a god-like eye-view of the facts at hand. Reality in "Meneseutung" is constructed in a narrative process with no clear beginning or tidy ending. The story opens with a narrator trying to understand the life of a poetess named Almeda Joynt Roth. The first document she examines is a poetry book, called *Offerings*, published after the poetess's death, which contains a picture and date of the book's publication. On observing the photograph, she starts to make connections and construct a possible subject out of the physical traces registered in the picture. All the way through, she acknowledges the tentative and limited aspect of her endeavor:

It is the untrimmed, shapeless hat, something like a soft beret, that makes me see artistic intentions, or at least a shy and stubborn eccentricity, in this young woman, whose long neck and forward

¹ "Meneseutung" was chosen for being one of the best illustrations of Munro's concern with issues of language and representation. "Runaway," published more recently, illustrates very well how this concern is still very much a part of her fictional production.

² For more on issues of language and representation in Munro's early fiction, see Heble, Ajay, *The Tumble of Reason*.

inclining head indicate as well that she is tall and slender and somewhat awkward. From the waist up, she looks like a young nobleman of another century. But perhaps it was the fashion. (477)

As the word “perhaps” suggests, right from the beginning we notice the narrator’s reluctance in making a positive assertion as to facts before her. She recognizes she is interpreting a document, a perception that might be clear off the mark.

The narrator proceeds with the reading, now quoting *verbatim* a long passage from the preface of the book. Here, she learns more about the family background and, especially, the poetess’s artistic intentions. From her early years, Almeda felt too clumsy for crochet and embroidery, thus preferring poetry to domestic tasks. The narrator proceeds now comparing a photo taken back in Almeda’s days to the present setting as it stands before her. Quite a few things have changed.

However, it is from the local newspaper, the *Vidette*, which delights in publishing all sorts of stories about the people in town, that she learns the town’s customs, gossips, disputes and settlements. In other words, the social, political, economic and religious context in which Almeda lived. Of the newspaper, she comments: “This is the *Vidette*, full of sly jokes, innuendo, plain accusation that no newspaper would get away with today” (482). From the *Vidette* she gets several pieces of information on Almeda’s social life. She finds out about her interest, at least according to people in town, for James Poulter, a salt miner who lived next to her house. At this point, the narrator provides a great deal of information (it is not clear where she gets it from, though) on Almeda’s habits, expectations, hopes and fears. Almeda struggles with insomnia, probably as a result of loneliness. The doctor prescribes her laudanum and asks her to avoid intellectual activities, to get more involved with household tasks. Following the doctor’s advice, she decides to make grape jelly to give away as Christmas presents. In her many sleepless nights, she has all sorts of strange thoughts. It is in these moments of delusions that she feels the most inspired to write poetry. She feels like writing a long poem that would encompass all the other poems she ever wrote: “The Meneseteung,” the name of the river.

“Meneseteung” ends with an excerpt from the *Vidette* reporting Almeda’s death by pneumonia. The narrator concludes the story reporting her visit to the cemetery to visit Almeda’s grave. She reflects on her effort

to put Almeda's life story together, and in the process acknowledges her inadequacy at making the right connections: "I may have got it wrong. I don't know if she ever took laudanum. Many ladies did. I don't know if she ever made grape jelly." Above all, she continues, she is just another one trying to understand Almeda's past. Others will come with "notebooks, scraping the dirt off gravestones, reading microfilm, just in hope of seeing this trickle in time, making a connection, rescuing one thing from the rubbish" (497).

"Meneseteung" stands out then as a narrative where construction rather than representation of reality is the main concern. Here, reality comes about in fragments – from the *Vidette*, the poetess's book, photographs – and becomes along the narrative not a tidy, linear set of events, but an assemblage of bits and pieces with no closure. As the narrator puts Almeda's life in narrative form, the reader is obliged to make the same types of inferences she has made. Consequently, the whole effort is open to all sorts of possible connections and interpretations. In other words, the reader embarks in the interpretive journey along with the narrator only to find out that the narrative does not provide clear distinctions between fact and fiction, truth and reality. The story problematizes, in this manner, representation models of reality by placing language and narrative at the center of our world conceptualizations. Here, as Nunes remarks, narration constructs meaning and arranges facts into a reality: "truth... always exists within the creation of narrative itself, as a contingent, uneasy harmony" (18).

Munro's concerns with issues of language and representation continue to be an important element in her more recent fiction. Several of her most recent stories – "Runaway" (2003), "Passion" (2004), "Dimension" (2006) – all deal, in one way or another, and in different levels, with issues of representation and narrativization. "Runaway" serves as a good example of a recent text where Munro departs once again from mimetic models by making meaning and reality construction a central theme. The story, set in a small countryside town, has Carla and her husband Clark as the main characters. They live in mobile home in a trailer park and run a type of horseback riding business, which at the time is barely making ends meet. Hardly anyone is showing up for rides, even though they have taken the effort to pass out fliers around town advertising the business.

The narrator also lets the readers know, mostly through textual clues and bits of dialogue, that the relationship between Carla and Clark

is based on imposition of authority. Although she voices her opinions around the house, Clark seems to have not only physical but also psychological control over her. She shows signs of fear over his usual ill humor, especially his rows with neighbors and some of the people in town. On one occasion, she responded to one of his rows with "You flare up," to which he coldly replied, "That's what men do" (2). To make some extra cash, Carla has worked up to the moment to Mrs. Jamieson – Sylvia, helping her watch over her terminally ill husband.

"Runaway" starts out thus with a setting typical of most of Munro's fiction: a small community with characters dealing with illnesses, death, and financial and domestic strife. Thus far, realist depiction of events and people set the tone of the narrative. However, as the story progresses, Munro subverts linear representational models by making meaning a constructive, semiotic and inferential process all the way through. The reader is brought to the scene of events, and much like the narrator in "Meneseung," has to probe the narrator's account and put together his or her own narrative. The first instance involves Sylvia's attachment to Carla, who has been working for her during the period of her husband's illness. The narrator mentions that one day, as Carla scrubbed a window on top of a ladder, she caught Sylvia staring at her in a unusual way: "Sylvia looked up, surprised by the watery sunlight that had come out – or possibly by the shadow of Carla on top of a ladder, bare-legged, bare-armed, her resolute face crowned with as frizz of dandelion hair that was too short for her braid... They both began to laugh. Sylvia felt this laughter running through her like a sweet stream." Later, the narrator continues, when heading to the kitchen, Carla drops a kiss on Sylvia's head, a gesture that "Sylvia saw...as a bright blossom, its pedals spreading inside her with a tumultuous heat, like a menopausal flesh" (4). On her trip to Greece, Sylvia comments with her friends several times about Carla and how she had become attached to her, to which her friends replied: "There's always a girl... We all come to it sometime. A crush on a girl" (5). Sylvia did not like the word "crush" and even saw her feeling for Carla as repressed maternal love, but even then she brought her a special present. The nature of this attachment, whether homoerotic or not, is never made clear in the narrative, even though it is provocatively suggested. Here, the reader is left to decide as to the nature and implications of Sylvia's feelings.

The second, certainly most important instance, has to do with Carla's decision to leave Clark. On the day Sylvia returns from her trip, Carla shows up at her house to tell how miserable she felt with Clark. It is important to stress that violence, whether physical or psychological, is never directly mentioned in the story. Sylvia comforts her and suggests that perhaps it would be better for both of them if she moved to another town. Arrangements are made with a friend of Sylvia and Carla does not go back home that night. She borrows some clothes and takes the evening bus to a town a few miles away. On the way off, she changes her mind and calls Clark up in the middle of the night. Clark shows up at Sylvia's house to break the news of Carla's return and tell her to mind her own business. A few days later, Carla receives a letter from Sylvia mentioning Clark's visit and something he had never told Carla: Flora's return. Flora was a pet goat that had been living with them for quite some time. One day the animal mysteriously disappeared without a trace. In the letter, Sylvia talks about Flora's mysterious appearance at her house the night Clark came over and how happy she was that both of them returned home safely.

Carla feels something ominous in the air, a feeling telling her to be cautious. From that day on, the narrator observes: "It was as if she had a murderous needle somewhere in her lungs, and by breathing carefully she could avoid feeling it" (14). As the days went by, she felt tempted to go into the woods nearby and see for herself, but she never did it. The story ends with no sure knowledge of what happened to Flora. Did Clark use Flora as a scapegoat, meaning that in the future he would do the same to Carla? The final lines provide no closure to the case. Maybe, if she walked into the woods she would find "the skull, with shreds of bloodied skin still clinging to it..." but "[p]erhaps something else had happened. Suppose he had chased Flora away, or tied her in the back of the truck and driven some distance and let her loose. Taken her back to the place they'd gotten her from. Not to have her around, reminding them of this bad time" (15).

In "Runaway" Munro once again starts out in a straightforward manner only to complicate the plot as the narrative progresses. Sylvia's attachment to Flora is mostly suggested, yet never explained or resolved. In fact, the text mentions other occasions when Sylvia felt a similar kind of attachment to girls. As a teacher, she met quite a few girls during her career, and "every so often there had been a special student girl in one of her classes..." (5). However, the reader is left to make the inferences and

come to his or her own conclusions. Clark's psychological abuse of his wife Carla is mostly suggested as well through short dialogues, and later, in his possible killing of Flora, their pet goat. Like Carla, Flora had also run away and returned, coincidentally, on the night Carla left and then came back to Clark. Whether Clark did or did not put an end to Flora is not directly stated in the story, although the reader is left with the clear impression that, given his strange behavior, he probably did it. The only clue the text presents is Carla's noticing the recent presence of several birds and crows flying over the woods nearby. It was sort of strange how they would go "circling and dropping to earth, disappearing over the woods, [and] coming back to rest in the familiar bare tree" (14). In the end, it is uncertain whether Flora was killed or taken back to where she came from.

In a postmodern manner, both "Meneseung" and "Runaway" depart from representational models of reality by stressing a fluid, malleable reality grounded in language and narrativization. If on the one hand, her narratives focus on apparently clear and straightforward aspects of human existence, on the other, as the examples above suggest, her texts challenge dualistic conceptions of reality by blurring the borders between fact and fiction, truth and illusion. Almeda's past in "Meneseung" can only be reconstituted through language, and in the process, both writer and reader can never be sure as to the veracity of the connections and inferences made. Carla's doubts as to whether Clark used Flora as a scapegoat will continue at the reader's level as well, since the narrative focuses more on suggestions rather than factual statements. The apparent realistic presentation of facts and characters in the beginning of the stories is replaced by ambiguity and uncertainty in the end. Reality or existence, she seems to suggest, is never simple and cannot be understood apart from the mechanisms and tools utilized to stage it out – language and narrative.

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The Deconstruction of Cultural Icons in the Fiction of Sandra Cisneros and Helena María Viramontes

Leila Assumpção Harris

Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro

The view of the nation as unitary muffles the 'poliphony' of
social and ethnic voices within heteroglot cultures.
(Ella Shohat 2006)

I wear garments touched by hands from all over the world
35% cotton, 65% polyester, the journey begins in Central America
In the cotton fields of El Salvador
In a province soaked in blood,
Pesticide-sprayed workers toil in a broiling sun
Pulling cotton for two dollars a day.
(Bernice Johnson Reagon 1985)

Trinh Minh-ha contends that there is no Third World without its First World and no First World without its Third World. Ella Shohat elaborates on Minh-ha's formulation, stressing that "Contemporary U.S. life intertwines First World and Third World destinies" (235). The struggles between these two worlds take place not only *between* nations but also *within* them (306). The "contact zones" thus created are often characterized by inequality and conflicts between dominant and subaltern groups (Pratt 6-7). Within a diasporic context that included conquest, annexation and colonization in the past and transnational migration in the present, contemporary Chicana writers¹ face the challenge of going beyond the

¹ The choice of the term Chicana implies political consciousness. For a detailed discussion of the issue, please consult Paula Moya's article.

varied barriers encountered by those who inhabit social spaces conditioned by power relations.

While the minority status exposes these women to multi-layered oppressions, their role as writers functions as a differentiating element that fosters the potential for agency, autonomy and synthesis. The literary production of Chicana writers brings into the foreground issues addressed by critics theorizing about “the use, abuse, participation, and role of women” (Spivak 250) in contemporary diasporas. While Gayatri Spivak cautions against the dangers of speaking for the *Other*, she does not dismiss that possibility and ponders about “gendered outsiders” that may acquire voice and agency (250-52). Trinh Minh-ha also examines the role of insiders and outsiders in order to describe the position from which a woman who mediates between two cultures speaks: “the moment the insider steps out from the inside, she’s no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. ... Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider” (415). Thus, the *loci* from where contemporary Chicana writers speak, a crucial element in their creation of a literature of resistance, inflect the challenge of making their voices heard.

Critic Maria Antónia Oliver-Rotger highlights the relevance of art and literature, located “in the interstices of the public and the private,” in the creation of a counter discourse. As she explains, “Since American society is not an open public ethos where one may participate independently of race and class, but a ‘private’ space where citizenship is restricted, it is in these ‘ragged edges’ of society that resistance struggles to the present configuration of a ‘privatized’ public sphere emerge” (130-31). In “*El Desorden*, Nationalism, and Chicana/o Aesthetics,” Laura Pérez argues that Chicana feminists destabilize, through their artistic imagination, “dominant social and cultural, spatial and ideological topographies of the ‘proper’ in the United States” and make room for Aztlán – their invisible ancestral nation – among the many nations that make up the “imagined community” known as the United States (19). Although Pérez’s text deals with practices adopted primarily by visual artists and poets, her observations apply to the literary production of many contemporary Chicana writers. The deconstruction of cultural icons, for instance, is one of the strategies

of resistance utilized Helena María Viramontes and Sandra Cisneros in order to expose what Edward Said refers to as “coercive or sometimes mainly ideological domination from above” (qtd. in Guha and Spivak vi).

As Stuart Hall observes, “national cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions but of symbols and representations” (292). In a society that thrives on consumerism, commercial products and symbols become ingrained in the imaginary of its members. A written text is, undoubtedly, as Homi Bhabha proposes, one of the most important “signs taken for wonder – an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline” (102). Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth-century, the written text – as an instrument used by the colonizer to control the imagination and aspirations of colonized people – was complemented, enhanced, even replaced by yet another powerful instrument of control: images.

According to Roland Marchand, “by the 1920’s in The United States, advertising had become a prolific producer of visual images with normative overtones, a contributor to the society’s shared daydreams” (235). After the Second World War, the effort to stimulate the economy through consumerism led advertising agencies to associate aesthetic, ethic and even moral values to the brand names advertised. In “The Culture of Advertising,” Paul Rutherford comments that “the style and rhythms and messages of commercial speech are embedded in our collective and public life.” Marshall McLuhan’s *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders*, Erving Goffman’s *Gender Advertisements* (1979), and Daniel Pope’s *The Making of Modern Advertising* (1983) are just a few of the studies about the power of advertising in modern capitalist societies (103). The meanings embedded in consumption symbols – be they movie stars or commercial products – promote the representation and institutionalization of values and beliefs present in the US culture and end up by transforming these symbols into intrinsic elements of the concept of the US as a nation.² Thus, we find side by side with traditional icons

²The essay “Consumption Symbols as Carriers of Culture” (see references) presents the results of an extensive research about the impact of consumption symbols on different cultures.

representing the US, such as The Statue of Liberty, Uncle Sam, and, more recently The Twin Towers, the images of commercial products such as Campbell's Tomato Soup – ironically perpetuated by Andy Warhol –, Sun Maid Raisins, Quaker Oatmeal, and many others that acquire symbolic meaning and are associated to a national culture.

In the Preface to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha discusses subordination as “one of the constitutive terms in a binary relationship of which the other is dominance,” emphasizing the need to discuss dominant groups without according them any sort of primacy (35). While discussing the role of resistance in literature, Chicana critic Alvina Quintana suggests that writers not only include characters that resort to oppositional tactics but also represent the “hegemonic system through which societal boundaries and the conditions for resistance are created” (58). In the fiction works featured in this paper, we encounter both the representation of characters that – subjected to different types of oppression – react against the oppressive system and the representation of the controlling processes used by the dominant group.

The second part of *Under the Feet of Jesus*, a novel published by Chicana writer Helena María Viramontes in 1995, starts with the description of thirteen-year old Estrella, picking grapes which, exposed to the sun, will turn into raisins. While working under the sweltering California sun, slitting the grape clusters from the vines, piling them up into a heavy basket, kneeling down to spread the grapes evenly to dry on a newspaper sheet, and getting up to start over the same procedure in a routine repeated for days on end, Estrella dwells on the differences that set her apart from the image of the young woman in a red bonnet stamped on the raisin boxes she has seen on supermarket shelves.

Carrying the full basket to the paper was not like the picture on the red raisin boxes Estrella saw in the markets, not like the woman wearing a fluffy bonnet, holding out the grapes with her smiling, ruby lips, the sun a flat orange behind her. The sun was white and it made Estrella's eyes sting like an onion, and the baskets of grapes resisted her muscles, pulling their magnetic weight to the earth. The woman with the red bonnet did not know this. . . . The woman's bonnet would be as useless as Estrella's own straw hat under a white sun so mighty, it toasted the green grapes to black raisins. (50)

In Viramontes's novel, the fertile valleys of California serve as background for a narrative about the miserable condition of men, women, and children – legal and illegal aliens and even citizens – who work in the fields picking vegetables and fruit and who migrate constantly in search of work. As we reflect upon the impact of the scene just described, juxtaposing the harsh reality of Estrella's life to the stylized, romanticized vision of rural landscape and work evoked by the bucolic image of the young woman on the raisin box, we observe not only the exploitation of migrant workers but also the power of images. Critic Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger speculates that Viramontes may have found inspiration for the passage in a 1982 serigraph created by Ester Hernandez. Under a skeleton dressed like the red-bonneted lady we associate with Sun-Maid raisins, the following caption underscores the parodic intent of the artist: "Sun Mad Raisins / unnaturally grown with insecticides, miticides, herbicides, fungicides" (qtd. in Oliver-Rotger 310). Although we have no information about the precise source of Viramontes's inspiration, we know that both her parents worked in the California fields. The novel is dedicated to them and to Cesar Chávez, leader of the 1962 campesino upheaval. We can also affirm that both the serigraph by Hernandez and the novel by Viramontes are part of a counter-narrative that aims at exposing the social inequalities affecting minority groups in the U.S.

Estrella knows by heart slogans featured on commercial ads such as, "Clorox makes linen more than white... It makes them sanitary, too! Swanson's TV Dinners, closest to mom's cooking. Coppertone – Fastest Tan under the sun with maximum sunburn protection" (31). Nonetheless, throughout the novel we witness the lack of buying power that would have enabled the family to take advantage of these products. In order to wash clothes, Estrella's mother must fetch and carry water besides making her own soap. In order to feed the family, she must count every cent and resort to her creativity. In a striking scene, we are presented with the deconstruction of another image deeply embedded in the US imaginary: the man on the Quaker oatmeal box. Watching her four brothers and sisters crying for food, Estrella opens a kitchen cabinet.

Nothing in the cabinet except the thick smell of Raid and dead roaches and sprinkled salt on withered sunflower contact paper and the Box of Quaker Oats oatmeal. Estrella grabbed the chubby pink cheeks

Quaker man, the red and white and blue cylinder package and shook it violently and its music was empty. (18)

In a desperate attempt to entertain her brothers and sisters, Estrella marches furiously through the house, drumming on the empty can of Quaker oatmeal and hoping that they will forget their hunger at least temporarily. The chubby pink cheeks of the Quaker patriarch and the red and white and blue of the cylinder package – the colors of the American flag – make the miserable condition of the family even more striking. In this particular passage, the product slogan is not included, yet because it is such a familiar brand, there is instant recall. However, the food “that warms the heart and soul” cannot fulfill its promise when there is not enough money to purchase it.³ It is important to notice that the verbs used to describe Estrella’s actions – she [drums] the top of his low crown hat, [slaps] the round puffy man’s double chin, [beats] his wavy long hair the silky color of creamy hot oats – signal not only her despair but also her repressed anger (19, my emphasis).

There are instances, however, in which the individual is stimulated to consume certain products – often unnecessary ones – and is able to acquire them, the purchase serving to mask unachieved needs and wishes. In *Feminism on the Border*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull draws attention to situations in which the advertising machine leads people to believe that having access to well-known brands “undoes the underlying material inequities” that separate them from the dominant group (102). Thus, the purchase of a Coke or a Big Mac, for instance, carries with it the illusion of “belonging.” That seems to be the case of Arlene, the protagonist of the short story “Miss Clair” by Helena Viramontes.

A single mother who works as a seamstress in a garment sweatshop, Arlene looks at her Saturday night outings as the high point of her week. The potential for change in her life seems limited to different partners on her weekend dates, and, above all, to the color of her hair – visibly damaged by the excessive use of chemical products – which may vary from platinum

³ See <http://www.quakeroatmeal.com/Archives/History/indexoat.cfm>. That was the slogan of the product for many years. The current one, “Something to smile about,” is also inappropriate in the context of the novel.

“Light Ash” blond to “Flame” redhead, and so on. At the beginning of the story, Arlene, together with her ten-year old daughter Champ, is inside a K-Mart, choosing cosmetics in preparation for yet another ‘romantic’ date. Arlene, who at one point accuses her daughter of living in lala land, “is completely alienated from her true reality and does not realize or comprehend the extent of her alienation” (Herrera-Sorbek 35). In search of the glamour and romance promised by the products she buys, Arlene imitates the gestures of the models she sees on TV commercials, but her shabby and unkempt house, the job in the sewing factory, and a “blind” nipple – burned during a date she prefers to forget – mark the distance which exists between her dreams and her reality. As Ella Shohat reminds us, “within postmodern culture, the media not only set agendas and frame debates but also inflect desire, memory and fantasy” (325).

The title of the short story, according to Oliver-Rotger, points to Arlene’s internalization of the “‘feminine beauty system’ of Western patriarchal culture, a complex and contradictory ideology or set of cultural practices controlled by the collective power of society that have as primary objective making woman attractive to men so that she may ‘get’ them” (208).

This same “feminine beauty system” makes Barbie the most popular and most coveted doll among girls influenced by U. S. culture. The short story “Barbie-Q” by Sandra Cisneros features two Chicana girls fascinated with Barbies (*Woman Hollering* 14-16). Although they are familiar with all the different Barbie dolls and the outfits that may be purchased separately, each girl owns only one doll and one outfit – a detail that reveals the limited buying power of their families. Their dream of having other Barbies is fulfilled only when damaged merchandise becomes available in a fire sale. The distinction between the point of view of “the real author” and that of the narrator – that is part of the conceptual model developed by Susan Lanser and adopted by Alvina Quintana in her discussion of the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros – (59) is useful for our discussion of this story. If on the one hand, the girls seem happy with water-soaked and sooty packages, with dolls that smell of smoke, and even with a doll with a melted foot, on the other hand the authorial perspective leads the reader to reflect on the simultaneous process of inclusion and exclusion that affects ethnic minorities in the U.S.

In “Ethnicity, Ideology and Academia,” Rosaura Sánchez addresses the issue of inclusion and exclusion, suggesting that U.S. cultural frontiers

sometimes extend beyond national borders while at times they act as barriers within those same borders.

If we consider acculturation at both ideological and material levels, ethnic groups in this country can be seen to suffer both inclusion and exclusion. Ideologically, thanks to the media and to the U.S. educational system, these groups will probably all have assimilated the same myths and dominant discourses and yet, materially, be excluded from the lifestyle, goods and services that characterize the life of middle and upper classes in the U.S. (295)

In *The House on Mango Street* (1984), there is a reference to the power of the media in the *vignette* "No speak English." *Mamacita*, who knows only three phrases in English and wants to return to Mexico, is desolated when her son who is learning to speak starts singing the Pepsi Cola commercial he has heard on television (78). Yet the trope chosen by Cisneros to underscore the social inequality existing between people who live on Mango Street and the US middle class is the house and all that it evokes to those who dream the American Dream. In the essay "Ghosts and Voices," Cisneros recalls the experience that inspired her to write the novel in question:

During a seminar titled "On Memory and the Imagination" when the class was heatedly discussing Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* and the metaphor of a house – a house, a house, it hit me. What did I know except third floor flats. Surely my classmates knew nothing about that. That's precisely what I chose to write; about third-floor flats, and fear of rats, and drunk husbands sending rocks through windows, anything as far from the poetic as possible. (72-73)

Esperanza, the teenage protagonist of *The House on Mango Street*, dreams of a house just like those she sees on television programs or those where her father works as a gardener. The family keeps moving from one cramped apartment to another until they finally move to their own house. The house, however, is nothing like what Esperanza has dreamed all along.

It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen that you have to push hard to get

in... There are stairs in our house, but they are ordinary hallway stairs, and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom – Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny. (*House 4*)

The small size, the decay, the lack of space and privacy – all contrast with the house dreamed of by the whole family, and so often described by the mother in bedtime stories (the reference to this type of story makes us think of fairy tales, in other words, fantasy), or by the father every time he bought a lottery ticket. Critic Sonia Saldívar-Hull emphasizes that “the image of the ‘house’ that Esperanza and her family hope to have is a product of ideological manipulation from above.” And she adds that “lottery tickets and highly publicized tales of the overnight transformation of factory workers into multimillionaires serve as additional ideological manipulation to obscure the injustices of a system built on the labor of the marginalized” (87-88).

In “The Marlboro Man,” another short-story by Sandra Cisneros, two friends discuss the *true* identity of the Marlboro man, an icon of strength and masculinity. While one of them affirms that the real Marlboro man was homosexual – and her source of information is the very media responsible for the creation and popularization of the original icon –, the other affirms that he lived with a friend of hers on a fabulous ranch and that he had the habit of taking off his clothes in public when he got drunk. The two friends do not reach a conclusion about the identity of the *real* Marlboro man. As one of them points out, “There’ve been lots of Marlboro men. Just like there’ve been lots of Lassies, and lots of Shamu the Whale, and lots of Ralph the Swimming Pig. Well, what did you think, girlfriend? *All* those billboards. *All* those years!” (*Woman Hollering 59*). This witty, ironic observation underscores the constructed and arbitrary character of representations – be they of cultural icons or even a nation.

Although the characters here featured have certainly assimilated myths and cultural representations associated with the United States, they rarely fulfill the dreams they are encouraged to pursue. As Rosaura Sanchez observes, “Being affected, influenced, and exploited by a culture is one thing and sharing fully in that culture is another” (295). Just like the visual artists discussed by Laura Perez, writers Helena Viramontes and Sandra Cisneros challenge through their fiction the visual and discursive history of the United States, as represented by its hegemonic base, and lead us to

look at those who live at the margins of society. It's worth remembering what Homi Bhabha says concerning the constant tension existing between the pedagogic and the performative narratives of a nation (148). Side by side with myths and cultural representations, we find narratives produced by people in their everyday lives. The deconstruction of cultural icons functions as a counter discourse that provokes the destabilization of the vision of the U.S. as a single "imagined community" and of the representations that promote such vision.

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India's "Truths": Criticism Across Borders for an Alter-Post-Colonialism¹

Makarand Paranjape

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

"Big countries will have to sit and bargain with us. We do not need lessons from them. In fact, we can teach them."

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil,
in *Business Standard*²

I

Even as the largest conference of English Teachers in South America gathers in Belo Horizonte, the President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is on an official visit to India. The quotation just cited, thus, comes at a most opportune time because it addresses the key theme of my paper, which is how to reduce if not bypass Anglo-American (or more generally Western) dominance of literary studies. The challenge, as I see it, is to

¹ This paper was given as a Keynote address during the first international Abrapui Conference at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, on 5th June 2007. My special thanks to the President of Abrapui, the very able and energetic Professor Gláucia Renate Gonçalves of UFMG, and to my friend Professor Carlos Gohn for giving me this opportunity.

² <http://www.business-standard.com/common/storypage.php?autono=286700&leftnm=3&subLeft=0&chkFlg;> accessed on 4 June 2007.

examine what resources can come from India for such a project. And inherent to this is the task actually of constructing and re-interpreting India, which I propose to do here. But this a project by its very nature has to be “unfinished,” tentative both its substance and structure, despite the apparent assertiveness of the title.

One of the pressing challenges that we face as teachers of language and literature today is work towards the possibility of a different world order, not just in the political and economic spheres, which are probably not our direct concern, but certainly in the intellectual, cultural, and linguistic spheres. The imperative is to come together in solidarity in order to oppose the dominance of Western, more specifically Anglo-American, modes of theorizing, thinking, teaching, and being. To me this coming together must be direct, without the mediation of the metropolis. Ideas need to circulate in a more straightforward manner, not deviated through Western print capitalism or academic institutions. Alter-post-coloniality can be created only through such enabling exchanges between, for instance, Indians and Brazilians, among others.

We might pause to ask, what is wrong with the dominant? Each of us will have his or her answers to this based on the lived experience. I would venture to assert that whether we live in the metropolis, like Jonah in the belly of the beast, or outside it, in the periphery or semi-periphery, we have all felt the discomfort of this dominance. Asymmetrical power relations produce both distress and resistance. Regimes of power, as the native American critic Ward Churchill once said, produce either “good” or “bad” subjects. The former are maintained and rewarded, the latter pacified or eliminated. But as Churchill says, the challenge is really to be “non-subjects,” to get on with our own narratives and concerns, without being threatened with cooptation or extermination. This is the challenge of *svaraj*³, or self-rule, self-realization, self-governance, self-illumination—or of liberty, equality and fraternity, as the European Enlightenment chose

³ An ancient Sanskrit word, “svaraj” was resurrected during India’s freedom struggle by nationalist stalwarts like Dadbhai Naoroji, Lokmanya Tilak, and Mahatma Gandhi to mean independence and self-rule. Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (1909) is a classic text of non-violent revolution.

to phrase it. The two are not identical, as I will endeavour to show, but they do suggest a convergence of directions and pursuits.

The imbalances in our world are not just literary, but linguistic. On the one hand, each day many languages on this planet are dying, while certain languages, especially English, are gaining in power and importance. It would seem that though the British Empire has perished, the empire of the English language is imperishable. Where I come from, that is India, many upper class children have forgotten their mother-tongues. With the loss of language, there is a great loss of culture too. Urban upper class Indians know very little about their own country. If they were asked to explain a poem, a song, or a painting that is more than 200 years old, many of them would be at a total loss. When I was last in China, two years back, I was amazed to find that the cultural memory of most the young Chinese students was just fifteen or twenty years. They knew so little even of their parents' struggles or about the Cultural Revolution, let alone of "the great leap forward." Most of the students I talked to in Guangzhou University had not even read Marx or Mao. I don't know if this is good or bad—but, more seriously, it seems as if global cultural patrimony is shrinking. Like amnesia or aphasia, these losses are serious for us because with them we also lose the wisdom of our ancestors.

Indeed, the primary focus of my paper is this wisdom of India, which I try to reinterpret for our own purposes. More specifically, what India has to offer in this common challenge that faces us. I call these resources "India's Truths." I must clarify at the outset that the India that I bring to you today is quite different from what you might expect if you are post-colonial critics or scholars, at least from the usual manner in which India is represented in the literature and discourse. This "other" India is, however, always present to those who have sought it, alongside, beneath, sometimes within the more familiar India of diasporic writers and theorists. The uncanny persistence of this India is what I would like to talk about. This is not the stereotypical "timeless" or "eternal" India, though I do wish to invoke the resonance of *sanatan dharma*⁴, or the

⁴ This phrase has been used to describe Hinduism itself, but actually means "the perennial way." I use it more in the latter sense.

perennial path. This India is very specifically locatable in history because it responded to specific demands of history. That is why I think it can speak to our own demand today to work for a different theoretical, pedagogical and cultural paradigm that is free from the distorting dominance of Western thought. I would like to invoke the India of Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo, to mention two names, rather than the India of Salman Rushdie or Arundhati Roy. Not that these two Indias are separate, but we usual forget the one because we are so focused on the other.

Let me briefly revert to the title now. It is very far from my intention to suggest that there is one truth or set of truths about India. There are many truths about India and there are many paths to these truths. In fact, in a book that I wrote in 1993, which is called *Decolonisation and Development: Hind Swaraj Revisited*, I have a chapter called "Defining India," where I say is that if we want to understand our place in the world, first we have to define who we are. One way to define India is by positing that it offers a culture of plural possibilities, but also a culture with certain emphases. This is how we might negotiate the problem of essentialism, because if you say India has one truth, then you're going against the basic premise of India being a plural space, the basic concept that was enshrined in the Rig Veda, "*Satyam eka, vipram bahuda vadanti*," truth is one; the wise call it by many names.

Theoretically, this is an interesting paradigm, because it does not lead to relativism, where you can have many views with the same ontological or metaphysical status, which is the case with the modern world. Granted that the modern world is plural to some extent, but, at the same time, its matrix is marked by radical singularity. For example, you have a choice to use any toothpaste that you want, but not the choice to use a twig to clean your teeth. At the level of the toothpaste, all the brands have the same status, as equally valid choices, aside from what the advertisements say, but not to use toothpaste at all, that choice is forbidden. In India, on the other hand, the unity of truth is accepted. The truth is not entirely, endlessly, infinitely plural, like the post-modernists would sometimes argue. That is an anti-foundationalist position, but anti-foundationalism becomes what I call pseudo-foundationalism because when you de-centre the centre, you are creating a centre of another kind, a pseudo-centre, if you will—something that stands for and does the work of a centre. The unity

of truth is accepted in India, but this unity is itself constituted as a field of difference, of plurality, diversity, and endless possibilities.

So India is a place where you have plural possibilities, but with certain emphases, and I think this is how we can reconcile the question of whether there are any special truths that India has to espouse. No doubt, India can espouse many, many truths, but yet, among these many truths, some are perhaps more fundamental, suggesting a certain cultural orientation, civilisational enterprise, or even national responsibility. India is not a nation state, but a civilisational state, and a civilisational state must, in some ways, espouse and uphold certain values. To bear the responsibility, to bear the burden, to bear the obligation of Dharma is what India must stand for—at any rate, this is what I propose.

I would like to venture one more thing that post-colonial theory does not touch upon, which is how the foundational ideas of nations, cultures and civilizations are established. It seems to me that nations or civilizations have essentially two kinds of founders—conquistadors and sages. Most nations are founded on conquest—the so-called distinction between settler colonies, such as Brazil or invader colonies such as India is only technical when it comes to this. The fact is that both colonies were created through conquest. The conquest paradigm is thus the most common in history. Tribal societies, indigenous societies, of course, are not products of conquest. They trace their ancestry to mythical animals, birds, and natural causes. However, among established, post-indigenous cultures, conquest is the common factor. The United States, for instance, was founded upon the conquest and genocide of indigenous people even though its constitutional ideas came from the European Enlightenment. Most Islamic societies are also based on conquest and conversion.

In India, however, we believe that our society is based on the precepts of rishis or the ancient seers. Each clan and caste, to this day, traces its descent to some rishi or sage in the mythic times. These sages were considered more significant than kings. The kings, whether elected or preferred by birth, were merely considered administrators, the keepers and protectors of Dharma. The real founders of the society were the sages, those enlightened beings, who were also our ancient legislators. Even today, we might argue that modern India is formed by rishis such as Gandhi and Aurobindo, not by Presidents and Prime Ministers. I am mixing the mythical with the historical to maintain this *rishi parampara*

or wisdom tradition, which I believe to be my duty. To me this move is like the indigenous people's respect of their ancestors. If India is not a gladiatorial culture like the Romans were or the modern West is, if it is indeed a culture of yogis and *rishis*, we must remember the debt we owe to these *rishis*. That is why in this very paper, I have invoked the memory of Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Raja Rao, to name three examples.

It was Sri Aurobindo who provided a different basis for Indian nationalism than the civic nationalism of France or the romantic nationalism of Germany. After all, unlike European nations, India did not have the common glue of one language, religion, or ethnicity. Even Brazil, which is very diverse ethnically, has one language to bind it. Aurobindo proposed a "Dharmic nationalism" for India. He said that each nation has a soul or spirit, which it was uniquely blessed with and especially qualified to express. For India, this was Dharma. Without Dharma, India is nothing. As Aurobindo put it, "She does not rise as other countries do, for self, or when she is strong, to trample the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light, entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself, and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great."

I am sharing these ideas to because they are not usually found in post-colonial studies. One of the difficulties with the discipline is that it is constituted as an exclusively secular enterprise, indeed, Edward Said himself says so. But, as we know only too well, we may banish the religious, but it returns to haunt us, sometimes as our worst nightmare. That is why Jacques Derrida in his last writings called for a return of the sacred. Post-secular academics must engage with the sacred, not only in its pathological form, which is fanatical and violent, but in its benign and inspiring form, which is spiritual and nourishing. It is of this sacred India that I speak.

II

I would now like to shift my focus to something that is more literary—actually, to tell a story. This is a well-known story in India, occurring earlier in the Mahabharata, but immortalized by India's most famous classical poet, Kalidasa. In passing I wish to make the point that stories in India are always re-told, which makes no one version of them

authoritative. This story has also been retold many times—there are even studies about the implications of these retellings—but I think I would like to regard it as a story of India, of one of its originary myths, this story of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. The first thing to remember is that above all, it is very much a love story, and it might be described as a story of found, lost and found love. So the story of India is also a story of love.

Now why is this the story of India? The conventional answer is that from the union of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is born the child, the boy Bharata, after whom—according to one of the theories—India got its pre-British and pre-Islamic name, Bharatavarsha. Even today, the linguistic Hindi equivalent for constitutional appellation “Republic of India” is “Bharat Ganarajya.”

The story of Dushyanta and Shakunta starts with the king going on a hunting expedition. Chasing his quarry, he approaches a hermitage, the hermitage of the Rishi Kanva. Kalidas, who is such a great poet, talks about how the horses are themselves inflamed by the closeness of the game. The hunt is on, the king's sinews are taut, and he is about to release the arrow. Just then a young renunciate, a novice, from the ashram stands in the way of the king: “O King, stop, because this is a protected animal, this deer belongs to the hermitage of Rishi Kanva.” The king immediately gives the command to rein in the horses. Kalidas tells you that the horses are actually disappointed because they were so keen to go through with the hunt, sensing how close to the deer they were. The reigning in of galloping horses is, of course, a metaphor for the superior man's control of his own senses and passion, which can draw him away from his true nature. The king shows his mettle through his capacity for restraint.

Then this young hermit says, “Well done. You have acted as befits the house of Puru; you are supposed to be the protector of the weak, and this defenseless deer, which is running for its life, shouldn't be killed for sport. In any case, it is not a wild animal, but belongs to the hermitage.” The King is taught *rajadharma*, the duty of Kings, by the forest-dwelling hermit.

Now to fast-forward, the king gets down, goes to the ashram where he meets the enchanting and utterly virginal Shakuntala, they fall in love, and have a Gandharva Vivaha, a kind of love marriage. Interestingly, more than 80% of the marriages in India are still arranged, but in that ancient story, the progenitors of the nation go through a simple and secret marriage

by a simple exchange of garlands, with the moon and stars as witness. Dushyanta goes away, promising to send for his wife later. Shakuntala is listless, thinking of her beloved husband, when the very short-tempered rishi, Durvasa, comes to the hermitage. So immersed is Shakuntala in anguished love, that she neglects her duties to the distinguished guest, who promptly curses her: "He whom you are thinking of now will forget you, as you have forgotten your obligations and duties to your guests."

What a crisis! When her companions hear of it, they rush to the aid of Shakuntala, pleading with the sage to revoke it. But that is impossible; the words of a sage have to come true. Mollified, perhaps by a good meal and some warm hospitality, the sage offers to mitigate the effects of the curse. "If you show him something that he has given you, he will remember who you are again." As the story proceeds, we find that Dhushyant does not send for his wife and poor Shakuntala, in the meanwhile, finds out that she is pregnant. So she decides to go to the court of the king to present herself to him.

On the way to the palace, while bathing in the river, she loses the ring that the king had given her. The city, with its palaces and bazaars, is a different world from the sylvan hermitage where nature is itself as yet unfallen. Here, money and power rule human relations. When she announces herself to the King, he says, "Woman, I don't know you." In the skeleton story in the Mahabharata, Shakuntala's response is much more spirited. But in Kalidasa, she is much more delicate, thus a figure of pity. Her escorts from the ashram also leave, saying the matter is now between her and her husband. The King, owing to Durvasa's curse, has forgotten who Shakuntala is. Alone and abandoned, she goes away, bearing the king's child, unbeknownst to him.

After her departure, Dushyanta is extremely sad. He doesn't know why. I think this is one of the tragedies of the human condition that somewhere in our hearts is a yearning, a quest, for something much deeper than our mundane, material reality, and we don't know what it is that our heart really craves for. Dushyanta too cannot find any solace in the pleasures of his palace. Several days pass, but he is unable to fathom the mystery of his melancholy.

Then, (un)luckily for him, the ring is restored; a fish in the river swallowed it; a fisherman found it after cutting open the fish; the King's guard's arrested the fisherman trying to sell the royal signet. So the ring is

the mnemonic device which reminds him of his lost beloved. Now his mourning has a cause and thus probably worse than the earlier sense of unknown loss.

Some years pass. The King is invited to fight for Indra, the King of the Gods, because there's a war going on between the Gods and the demons. The Gods win, with the help of humans, which I think is also interesting for us. Dushyanta is sent back from heaven to earth in a winged chariot, flying first class, you see, and stops off at another hermitage, that of Maricha Rishi. There he sees a fearless lad playing with lion cubs. He picks up the child much to the consternation of the on-lookers, asks, "Whose son are you?" The child resists and says, "Don't touch me; my father is the King and no one else can pick me up." The boy's words come true as the inmates of the ashram rush out to find Shakuntala's long-separated husband come back. The boy is Bharata. He grows up to be a great king and gives India its traditional name.

Now I come to the crux of the story: there are two journeys to two hermitages in *Shakuntala*. The first is to the hermitage of Kanva Rishi and takes Dushyanth to Shakuntala. The second takes Dushyanth to the hermitage of Marich Rishi and restores his child and, as it were, his lost love and wife back to him. The two journeys, to me, are symbolic, as also the two chariots in which they occur. The first chariot is earth-bound; in it the king almost kills an innocent deer for his pleasure and later finds, marries, and abandons his love, Shakuntala. This journey results in brief happiness, but long desolation. The second chariot is actually a heavenly vehicle, the golden chariot of the Gods in which Dushyanth comes back to earth from the sky-realm. It is this chariot that restores his wife and child back to him.

I have a brief quotation from a very lovely modern edition of *Shakuntala*, which I recommend. Called *Shakuntala, or the Ring of Remembrance*, published by Auroville Press, it is a very small book, just a hundred pages, actually retold from Sanskrit to French, and then it has been translated, or adapted into English, by Roger Harris. Here's the quotation: "Love born in the paradise of childhood and innocence is regained, transmuted, and magnificently widened in another paradise that one could call divine. As there are two chariots, a terrestrial and a heavenly one, so there are two journeys, one, through the forest that leads the king

to a world of marvelous purity, and the other through the regions of the sky, that brings him to a universe of light. From the union of the two is born Bharat, the support of the world.” So here we have the first meaning of India, to support, which is one of the roots of the word Bharat—in modern Indian languages, *bhar* means weight, that which is borne. That is why I spoke earlier about India’s responsibility.

As Gandhi said in a speech to Indian Christians in 1925, two decades before independence,

I call myself a nationalist and I pride myself in it. My nationalism is as broad as the universe. It includes in its sweep even the lower animals. It includes in its sweep all the nations of the earth, and if I possibly could convince the whole of India of the truth of this message, then, India would be something to the whole world for which the world is longing. My nationalism includes the well-being of the whole world. I do not want my India to rise on the ashes of other nations. I do not want India to exploit a single human being. I want India to become strong in order that she can infect the other nations also with her strength. (*Collected Works* 32: 247-48)

Or as Sri Aurobindo put it more succinctly in his famous Uttarpara speech in 1909, “It is for the Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists.”⁵

To draw some morals from the story, I would like to reiterate that the idea of India is born out of love, not out of hate, not out of war, not out of an opposition to anyone or anything, even to the British. The second important thing is that it is born out of the union of the earthly and the divine. Shakuntala, herself, the mother of Bharat is the daughter of an earthly sage, Visvamitra, a warrior who then becomes a man of religious power, and a heavenly damsel, Menaka. Hence I have tried to show how two journeys, two chariots, two aspirations, two forces come together to produce the child, Bharat.

For the more esoteric meaning of Bharat, we must go to the other root of the word, *bh*. It means to shine, to shed light. Thus you get one of the words for the sun, Bhasker, he who creates light. So India is that which gives light, which illumines. When we ask what is the responsibility of

⁵ <http://intyoga.online.fr/uttaspch.htm>.

India, what is its *svadharma*, then we must accept the fact that it is to illumine, to give light. But what kind of light should India give?

To answer this question, we might look at the material conditions of India right now—the growing population, the rapid pace of change, the economic expansion, and the technological advances—India is actually living out what Alvin Toffler called *Future Shock*. Coping with the pace of change has now become so difficult that it's become a psychological or cognitive challenge to most Indians. Sometimes we understand what's happening around, and sometimes we don't. For instance, in conversations with my mother about the city she lives in, she says to me, "I'm so bewildered by Bangalore, I can't recognize this road, there was no flyover here, I used to turn left here but now it's become a one-way." To me this symptomizes a deeper sense of disorientation, or dislocation, that we experience in India. We are at home, but we are not at home any more, because home has changed so much.

Given these challenges, what is it that India stands for? Here I would refer you to another book, which, though by an important post-colonial author, has not been read very much. It is called *The Meaning of India*, by Raja Rao. Rao, who died last year at the age of ninety-eight was the author of pioneering and far-reaching novels such as *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope*. In *The Meaning of India* (1998) he says that India is not a *desa*, it is a *darsana*. *Desa* means country or nation, while *darsana* means a way of seeing, a vision, a perspective, or a philosophy. According to Raja Rao, India is not a country, but a vision, a way of viewing. With due respects and apologies, I would modify that statement to say that India is both a *desa* and a *darsana*, both a country and a point of view—because a *darsana* cannot exist without a *desa*—even a revelation needs a form, local habitation, and a name. Just as our consciousness is embodied, every perspective too is housed, grounded, located. This locus is a part of our reality. So, just as it would be an error to say that we are nothing but our bodies, to say that our bodies are our entirety—that is, we are nothing other than our bodies—it would also be an error to say we are not our bodies. India too, though it cannot be confined to its geographical location, cannot be totally removed from that location either.

Just as we are not merely our bodies, but we are our bodies too, similarly, the vision that India offers is not merely confined to India, but is also located in India. This vision, this *darsana*, is available to the whole

world. So ultimately, India is an invitation—it invites you to consider reality from a certain perspective, and that reality is not exclusive to India. Though few people have interpreted it in this manner, E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* also makes a similar point. The architecture of the book suggests affirmation, negation, and transcendence, corresponding to the three sections, Mosque, Caves, and Temple. Whatever else it may be, and it is a lot else including a social and political book, *Passage to India* is also a deeply spiritual book. It is this aspect that the post-colonial critics and scholars have neglected. The other Anglo-India classic, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, which is an earlier book than Forster's, and usually read as the quintessential imperial text, is also, as it happens, a deeply spiritual book. Parallel to the great game, which is a metaphor for empire, is wheel of law, the greater game of karma and reincarnation from which both the Lama, Kim's putative father, and Kim seek release. *Kim* ends not on the grand trunk road where the game of empire is played, but far away and high above the bustle of power and pelf, in the Himalayan foothills where the Lama finds his sacred river and where Kim too, through his selfless service, finds his redemption. While the two games are indeed related, even intertwined, Kipling seems to suggest that the real game is spiritual, not political. It is here that a marriage of East and West is also suggested in the novel by the author whose most quoted statement is "never the twain shall meet." In an audacious metamorphosis, the sub-plot flips into the main plot, while the imperial capers with which the novel began are rendered secondary. Whatever else it may be, India remains deeply spiritual, Kipling seems to suggest.

There is the danger that my argument may be leading towards an Indian exceptionalism. Just as American exceptionalism is not always a good thing, I would agree that Indian exceptionalism may not be a good thing. This has been the tendency of some proponents of Hindutva, of right-wing Hindu nationalism. Similarly, there are those who hold that India is the greatest country with the greatest culture and the Vedas, the sacred books of the Hindus, hold all the wisdom in the world, and all that is glorious and great and wonderful has already been spoken of or written in our tradition. These are ridiculous claims, not taken seriously even by those who make them. But because there are these dangers and drawbacks, we cannot altogether turn our backs to what India has to offer.

III

So, in this last section of my paper, I want to try to offer my view of the “truths” that India espouses. These may be, to some extent, idealizations, but that does not mean that they have no basis in reality or history. I would like to organize my points in three ways: the metaphysical, the political, and the cultural. This is not a closed, but an expanding set, to which we can add other elements. Indeed the “truths” of India can be harnessed to many domains. It is for us to work out precisely how they apply in the realm of an alter-globalization and a new world intellectual order. I intend to offer a replicable methodology.

So let me start by trying to define India’s truth in the domain of metaphysics. Raja Rao in *The Meaning of India* calls this truth non-dualism. I tend to agree. There may be controversies about non-dualism or with the Sanskrit word, *advaita*, which also refers to a particular branch of Indian philosophy. But I would like to use the term in a wider fashion as a way to overcome binaries, dialectics, linearity, dualism, and so on. Non-dualism is different from monism—as it is from dualism. Most people do not understand this. It is not the opposite of dualism or something which denies difference. The word is a negative, like de-colonization, implying non-something. That something, in this case, “dualism,” exists within it. Duality, the separation between you and me or subject and object, seems to be the basis of our daily life. To deny it in a simple-minded manner would be futile. Is dualism, however, true ultimately? If it were, then our history of wrong-doing would be justified because we are doing these things to others, free from the consequences ourselves. But that is impossible. It is like destroying the earth believing that it will not affect us. Dualism allows us to treat others instrumentally, thus going against both the golden rule and Kant’s categorical imperative. Dualism, ultimately speaking, is violent. Non-dualism, on the other hand, enjoins upon us to treat others responsibly because there are no others; everyone one is our self, different versions of our self. Non-dualism recognizes two or three or more, but denies that these are separate or unconnected. It allows both identity and plurality without creating a division between them. Ultimately, as compound word, it suggests something beyond itself.

After metaphysical non-dualism, let me come to its political equivalent. In political terms, I would call it *svaraj*, going back to Gandhi.

What is this word *svaraj*? It is a very old word, but comes into the vocabulary of modern India in the nineteenth century. When the struggle for freedom started acquiring a certain momentum, people like Dadabhai Naoroji used the word *svaraj*. Lokmanya Tilak used the word *svaraj*, Sri Aurobindo used the word *svaraj*, and of course, Gandhi used the word *svaraj*—he wrote a book, *Hind Swaraj*, 1909. All of them used the word to signify political independence from the British. But etymologically, the word means much more than that. Actually *svaraj* is a “corruption” of the Sanskrit word *sva-rajya*, which was an abstract noun. When applied to a single individual, the word was *svarat*, an adjective. It is a word that occurs many times in the Upanishads in the Chandogya, in the Taittiriya, and in the Maitri Upanishads.

But what is this *svarajya* and who is *svarat*? It is a compound word *sva + raj*; *sva* means self and *raj*, means to shine. Hence the word means both the shining of the self and the self that shines. The word *raj* gives us many words associated with power including *Raja*, *Rex* and *Regina*. The root, *raj*, suggests to shine—“*raj deepnoti*,” that is why the word for silver is *rajat*, because it shines. The light metaphor is very important in the Vedas because it suggests the sun of higher consciousness—*Tat savitur verenyam*, of the Gayatri mantra, a metaphor used in both Islamic traditions as in Rumi, and in Christians traditions as in Dante. It is to that sun, *savitur*, that Sri Aurobindo refers to in his great poem, *Savitri*. So *svarat* is a self-luminous person, and *svarajya* is a state of being *svarat* or enlightened. You might actually say that *svaraj* is another word for enlightenment.

It is in India that political independence was expressed in terms of enlightenment, self-illumination, not necessarily in opposition to the colonizers or imperialists. *Svarajya*, then, is the principle of perfection, of perfect governmentality, because illumination comes from internal order, not from oppression. Originally, *svrajya* referred to the internal government of a person, the government of the limbs, and of the senses, of the organs, all the different constituents of the individual. When that is well-governed, a person who can rule himself is a *svarat*. So *svarajya* is self-rule or self-governance.

But what of the *sva*, the same root as the western *sui*? Self-rule also means the rule of that self—but which self? The *Id*, the *ego*, or the *superego*, to use the Freudian set? In traditional Indian psychology, unlike in Freud,

there was not only the unconscious self, but also the super-conscious. That is in each of us, the higher self, the divine self. So svaraj would be the rule of that self within us. Svarajya is the state of self-mastery; the master of senses is svarat. He or she is nothing less than the yogi perfectly poised in himself or herself. What is the opposite of svarat? It is *anyarat*—*anya*, other, ruled by others. These others could be the British or the Americans or even our own internal demons. The Upanishad clearly says that those who are *anyarat* perish; they go to the worlds that perish. This is the smoky path of the night that leads to repeated births, while svrajya is that luminous path or state where there is no return.

Synonymous with liberty, freedom, and independence, svaraj also suggests a host of possibilities for inner illumination and self-realization. I prefer the word svaraj to de-colonization because svaraj is not against anyone else. One's own svaraj can only help others and contribute to the svaraj of others. In svaraj the personal and the political merge, one leading to the other, the other leading back to the one; I cannot be free unless all my brothers and sisters are free and they cannot be free unless I am free. Svaraj allows you to resist oppression without hatred and violent opposition. Gandhi developed the praxis of satyagraha or insistence on truth or truth-force to fight for the rights of the disarmed and impoverished people of India.

The svarat is a person who has good government of his own body or good self-government. Gandhi and the others applied it to the body politic. Simply speaking, we do not want to be ruled by others. This also means we should not try to rule others. Svaraj also means self-restraint, self-regulation. If we are all self-governing, the state as we know it will wither away. For Gandhi, an ideal society consisted of highly evolved, self-regulating individuals, who respected themselves and the others. Such a society did not need policemen or law enforcers because each citizen was looking out for the welfare of others.

So, politically what India stands for is *svraj*, even if we cannot always practice it. There is a deep quest in the Indian political psyche for autonomy. We do not want to be part of an American narrative, European narrative or a Chinese narrative. We respect their narratives; they can pursue their own narratives, but we want to be left free to pursue ours. Whatever our civilizational narrative is, we want the autonomy and the freedom to pursue that. If we become powerful we do not want to oppress others and force them to pursue our narrative. That is svaraj.

Svaraj means not to rule others, as I said earlier. One of the clichés about India is that no matter how powerful the country was, it did not send expeditions of conquerors to countries outside this peninsula, huge armies being sent here and there to conquer and colonize, to bring the loot back from these expeditions. This is how the Arabs, Turks, the Persians, the Afghans, the Portuguese, British, Dutch, French and the others behaved, coming to India to conquer and plunder, but there is no record of Indian armies doing the same. There are no narratives of Indians bringing back loot from China, and from Egypt, and from Tibet, and from Champa, and from Indonesia and from Malaysia, sending huge ships and bringing back wealth, or land expeditions, camels laden with gold—no, we don't have those narratives. There was a large sphere of Indian influence, but most of it was not through armed conquest, but cultural osmosis and exchange. So the historical record of India does not show a desire to go and rule other people, to enforce our will on others, to trample them, to exploit them economically, to oppress them, to crush them—that is not the Indian way, in my opinion.

But, by the same token, to be ruled by others is also unacceptable to us, and we will struggle against it. Throughout Indian history, the struggle for svaraj has gone on. We have records of villagers protesting against emperors, blocking roads, refusing to pay taxes, fasting, and so on. In the 150 years of British rule, there was a revolt every single year in India. Some part or the other was always up in arms against British rule. So Pax Britannica was a great illusion. There was no Pax Britannica, because if you are an imperialistic power, you are ruling with the force of arms. Can you have peace in Iraq, where every day there is a car bomb? For peace, you need svaraj.

So svaraj is a political ideal, which comes from a deep spiritual ideal, resurrected during India's freedom struggle, defined and re-deployed by great Indian thinkers like Aurobindo and Gandhi. Writing in 1946, a year before independence, in his paper, *Harijan*, Gandhi outlined his vision of a good society:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the

latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. (*Complete Works* 91: 326)

In Gandhi's model of oceanic circles we have a way of relating which is very different from the pyramidal. In the latter, you have a few people on top ruling the rest; as you go higher and higher, the number is smaller and smaller, until at the very top, you have only one person. In Gandhi's model the individual is the centre of the oceanic circle, but continually expands his world to include his family, his neighbourhood, his village, his state, his country, and so on. What is wonderful is that Gandhi allows each person to be the centre of his or her cosmos, but such a centre that wishes to expand and include. So the self in *svaraj* is not a limited but an expanding, potentially unlimited self, which can stretch to embrace the whole cosmos. Ultimately, the self alone is; there is no other. The Gandhian model is not one of conflict, but of cooperation. Progress does not necessary come though clashes of opposites as in Hegelian and Marxian praxis.

Finally, to the cultural realm. Here I would suggest the counterpart of metaphysical non-dualism as being non-exclusion. The principle is not to exclude. Again, non-exclusionism is different from inclusionism, because we cannot include everybody. That is an ideal, a myth. Some people will always be excluded; inclusion is a mask, a boast, a deception. The rich and powerful rule in the name of being inclusive. When the marginalized protest, some scraps of privilege are thrown to them to keep them quiet. Non-exclusionism, on the other hand, tries to create a just social order by refusing to consider exclusive entitlements to power or prestige. Theoretically, no one will be excluded; practically, some people may still be left out, however. If this is the case, you have refine the system or even make special attempts to include them. But non-exclusion implies the humility to know that we are not perfectly just, but that we would try to be so. It also saves us from the trap of political correctness. If you claim to be inclusive, on the other hand, you end up with a tokenism. This tokenism camouflages a more flagrant kind of inequality as in many so

called advanced countries. Look at the U.S., where they are proud to be inclusive, or Canada, where multiculturalism is a state policy. But when I go there I find there is no place for me. If I complain, they say, "Show us where a law is being violated." I reply, it's not a matter of law, it's how you have designed your societies. They are exclusive from start to finish; because you have realized that that is unfair, you now try to include the others. The principle of exclusion has not ended, but is sought to be mitigated by tokenism. Once the quota is filled, the society remains as exclusive, racist, or oligarchic as ever. My question is if we can devise systems which are non-exclusive to begin with. Then no special inclusiveness will be needed.

So, the point is that it is more important not to have closure than to include every single number in a system. Reality cannot be exhausted numerically. In India, there is no alpha point or omega point, no point of origin or conclusion. No single book, God, or prophet, no one dogma or church, no one belief system or dictator. It is an open system, bounded by certain precepts, like a mandala. So even if you say everything starts with the big bang that is not Sanatani, the Indian would say what happened before the big bang? One of the creation hymns of the Rg Veda asks precisely such a question. It's answer the creator of the system knows or, perhaps, even he doesn't know. That is why Raja Rao said India has no enemies, only adversaries. And today's adversary will be tomorrow's friend. As I keep saying, yesterday's *asura* can become today's *deva*.

Conclusion

I have tried to share these "truths" from India not because I believe that they are exclusive to India but because I believe they are a beautiful part of the heritage of humankind. It is for this reason that they should not be lost. The third way that India shows, to be neither the oppressor nor the oppressed, is not necessarily like Homi Bhabha's third space, which is between nations, interstitial and liminal. The third way of India is an alternative way of living and being, not always tied to power, to imperialism or its opposite. When we look at the world today, we see two clearly identifiable forces, at least in the political arena. There is US imperialism and in opposition to it is a kind of jihadism. One is systemic, the other

counter-systemic. Similarly, there is the force of globalization and then there are the anti-globalizers. But the third way would be something different than both the options, not locked into the dominant either as an ally or as an adversary.

The dominant forms of post-colonialism, which are located in the West, do not offer this space. They are a part of the Western narrative, however critically so from the inside. I think that it is countries like Brazil and India that should show the way by realizing the third way. We have to show viable social and intellectual systems which neither reproduce the contradictions of the dominant nor are at war with the dominant. Our countries and societies are large and vibrant. The non-Western world is actually the majority. But much of this world consists of failed states and unviable systems. They cannot provide the alternative. That is why it is left to some of us to do so.

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Feminist Criticism and Knowledge: (Literary) History and Its Silences

Rita Terezinha Schmidt

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Despite the current discourses on transnationalisms and postnationalisms, the national, as an issue and as a category of analysis in the production of knowledge on collective constructions of nationness has received a renewed scholarly interest. The focus on the national has become, for some, a question of how the signs of a national culture have been articulated in the archives of that culture, what cultural discontinuities and ambivalences they make visible, how meanings and values are positioned “as zones of control or of abandonment, or recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing” (Said 225). This is one of the reasons why the past has become of fundamental importance in literary studies, particularly from the perspective of feminist theories. Revisiting the historical and literary narratives that produced structures of symbolical meaning in close alliance with the ideological apparatus that sustained the national imaginary and its power to establish legitimate meanings in the sphere of formal culture has been a movement associated not only to revisions of canonical formations but also to rediscoverings of other agencies and narrations not given validation and recognition.

Literature played a vital role in drawing the symbolical map of modern nations’ cultural identities, particularly in the Americas, during the period of their consolidation in the XIX century. And the novel was the literary genre *par excellence* that had a major impact on the constitution of the public sphere of culture, for it embodied the tensions in addition to the rhetorical ones, attendant upon the project of modern nationhood. As

such, the novel became the domain where affirmations and contestations of ideologemes of the nation were enacted and thus, became a fictional genre that addressed the constitution of what Benedict Anderson's has termed "imagined communities."¹ This figuration of identity was forged and based on the invention of a commonality enforced by the civilizing mission and its logic of conquest and ritual destruction, what meant assimilation and eradication of intranational differences. The fictive nature of this alleged universal national body, an unproblematic unity and particularity of identity and culture that was meant to interpellate the people as one so as to establish nexuses of identification and belonging become clear when we consider the contradictions between that image and the realities of political structures and social organizations which were deeply bound up with the exercise of power, and which produced racial hierarchies, class divisions and gender asymmetries. No need to say that the idea of nationhood was defined as a distinct form of male bonding, in Anderson's words, "a deep horizontal comradeship" from which women were excluded (56). The interdependence of nationhood and the hegemonic form of cultural imaginary that we find in national or foundational narratives² led Judith Fetterly (1978) to use the phrase "the masculine wilderness of the American novel" (viii), when examining the cultural patterns present in American fiction.

Revisiting neglected literary works published in the XIX century that have remained in the shadow of the canon, that is, marginalized or deauthorized in the historical accounts of the institutionalized national culture (high culture as the one with lasting representativeness) is part of this shift in perspective in reading the national. By bringing hegemonic historiography to crisis, this effort opens up a space for change in the signification-function of the national sign-system.³ Today, feminist theories

¹ The expression is taken from Benedict Anderson (1983) in his classical work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

² One work that deserves reference in relation to this topic is Doris Sommer's (2004) *Ficções de fundação: os romances nacionais da América Latina*.

³ I am referring here to Gayatri Spivak's notions (1988) on subalternity and historiography elaborated in the essay "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography."

and criticism have advanced a whole array of new questions that allow us to probe into the pervasive mechanisms by which patriarchal culture secured the effacement of women in literature, for example. Not only were they assigned a marginal status as subjects in the field of literary production, but they were also silenced in the sense that their works did not count as literature or, at least, good literature, which means that the works were considered lacking literary worth, a judgement of value that served to justify their neglect in terms of academic critical attention. It has been no coincidence that one of the major thrusts of feminist criticism is related to women's literary underrepresentation in national canonical formations. In fact, recuperating women's texts and their narrative agency has evolved into one of the most path-breaking development in scholarship on national histories.

The notion of history, as used here, does not subscribe to a set of truth claims or empirical givens, but to an important argument about history as a discourse that narrativizes culture and, in so doing, it formulates objects and subjects within a complex structuring that constitutes a social formation, which means that narratives that have been legitimized for articulating knowledges about the past can be read for its social and political effects. Thus, if the canon can be regarded as one instance of a nation's past narrative, in which gender – investments in particular constructions of masculinity and femininity – constituted one of the means of male empowerment, it is of utmost historical importance to examine the narratives that have been suppressed and pushed to the nation's margins and, as a consequence, excluded from the field of historical and literary inquiry. To address this problematic in the present means, for feminist criticism, a transformative intervention in the national discourses of culture as much as bringing to the foreground the renarration of history by women has far-reaching implications to the ways we understand how social imaginaries were produced and national identities and traditions were engendered. Rereading texts which were not considered major and that did not count in mainstream literature in XIX century implies an examination of the institutional apparatus of nation-building, including here the role of literary histories and of the critical establishment. Such an examination is couched on the need to challenge the cultural determinations of codes of interpretation and value inscribed in the literary and academic

culture, what means to bring the battle over values and beliefs to bear on the interpretations of the past, both in terms of its politics of representation and on the values that gave legitimacy to some interpretations in detriment of others. In this scenario, the critical intersections of the categories of gender and nation are bound to bring insights that may contribute to pave the way to new literary histories.

There are no doubts that the question of women's authorship, in a diversity of national cultures, is posing vigorous interrogations regarding long-held assumptions of a literary establishment that has traditionally operated under the prerogative of an exclusive male writing culture. One is reminded here of the classical essay by Nina Baym (1986), "Melodramas of beset manhood: how theories of American fiction exclude women authors". A few titles confirm Baym's thesis: *Virgin Land*, by Henry Nash Smith (1950), *Symbolism and American Literature*, by Charles Feidelson (1953), *The American Adam*, by R.W.B. Lewis (1955), *The American Novel and its Tradition*, by Richard Chase (1957) and *Form and Fable in American Fiction*, by Daniel Hoffmann (1961). To question the critical discourses underlying the configuration of literary histories that take canonical formations as bases for their paradigm means, ultimately, to address the question of the constitution of imagined communities of the past.

I would like to point out the importance of studies on how and from what perspective XIX century American women's novels engage in the project of nation/narration and deploy the novel form as a complex textual instance of resistance and identity, from the perspective of the differences of gender and race. In order to do so, I would like to consider briefly, the novel *Ramona*, by Helen Hunt Jackson. It is a novel that has attained wide popularity since its first edition in 1884. With 15,000 copies printed at the time, the novel has inspired innumerable film versions and TV series since its publication (the classical film version was D.W. Griffith's, in 1910) and has, by now, more than 300 English-language editions. Jackson was a poet and a novelist, contemporary and friend of Emily Dickinson, who was well known in the intellectual circle of her time as she joined the company of writers and thinkers such as Henry Longfellow, Margaret Fuller and Lydia Maria Child (the editor of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861). Ralph Emerson had Jackson in high regard as she was, in his opinion, the major American

woman poet and deserved to be included in the collection of American poetry he organized, entitled *Parnassus*. It is worth remembering that Dickinson had not published any of her poems during the period. The editor Thomas Higginson, with whom Dickinson corresponded, had turned down the poems she had submitted with the recommendation that she should correct them. Yet, he favored Jackson whom he considered the most brilliant and impetuous woman of her generation. And in this sense, he was right in his judgment. Jackson's involvement with "the Indian question" emerged in the context of her interest in finding out all about their fate and dispossession after having attended a lecture given by a chief of the Ponca tribe in the Boston lecture circuit. What she heard then, fueled a long standing indignation against the US government's policies towards the Native-American population, which changed her life and her writing. Three years before the publication of *Ramona*, she published *A Century of Dishonour*, the result of her research in government files that proved the government double dealings in regard to Indian land. The book became the strongest indictment of the federal government's disregard for Native Americans.

The fate of *Ramona* in American literary history deserves some comments. Robert Spiller, the main editor of the monumental work *Literary History of the United States* (originally published in 1946, with a third edition dated from 1978), places Jackson among the generation of local colorists, mainly female, of the second half of the XIX century, while acknowledging her reputation by saying it "will last." According to him, *Ramona* fulfilled its role on behalf of the natives as much as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for the negroes, "but wound up as a romance about the dying Spanish society of southern California.... there is hardly a library in the land without several copies; it has hit millions in technicolor. Part of the enduring charm is in the principals and in the background and in the theme of thwarted love, but the greatest strength of the novel is *Heath Anthology* the portrait of Señora Moreno, guardian of the old Spanish ways against the encroaching Americans" (869). Defined thus, as a local color novel, which is another way of defining its minor status, according to criteria of values and conventions that rule traditional literary studies, *Ramona* did not merit any reference in the classical anthology by Bradley, Beatty and Long, *The American Tradition in Literature*, first edited in 1956

and, surprisingly, received only a small reference, in accordance with its minor status, in the Introduction of volume two of the *of American Literature*, published in 1998 under the general editorship of Paul Lauter, an anthology considered the best of its kind ever published for its methodology and the representativeness of the literary material included. The critic Valerie Mathes who wrote the Afterword of the 2002 Signet Classic Printing of *Ramona* observes that contemporary reviewers of the novel tend to emphasize its romantic plot – a love story – overlooking completely the condemnation that underwrites the fate of the lovers.

The novel indeed presents a love story between Ramona, a half-white (mixed blood) girl, raised by a Mexican widowed land-owner, and Alessandro, an American indian from a mission set in southern California, a territory under siege by the US government which was determined to bring the downfall of the Spanish Catholic missions and integrate Mexican settlers and Indians into the US territory. The story line follows the painful struggle of the married couple to survive as they were repeatedly driven from shabby land retreats by greedy American settlers and European immigrants (the so-called pioneers) supported by the US government. This was a time when the Indian tribes had their collective land titles withdrawn by the government, a way to force upon them a legal system that turned the Indian into an individual subject to state law (the General Allotment Act of 1887) and liable to taxation, in case he/she were able to own a piece of land. But as private ownership was a prerogative of the white man the law only contributed to the dispersal and the desintegration of many local tribes which had nowhere to go. The dramatic development reaches its climax when Alessandro dies by a shot wound inflicted during an incident of land invasion. Ramona's despair and her decision to cross the Mexican border so as to raise their baby daughter in a soil outside the US jurisdiction makes her the first American born heroine to live in exile by her own will.

By conceiving a plot that weaves a story of suffering, defeat and homelessness, the structure of which materializes, on different levels, a set of social and historical markers, Jackson discloses the enormous institutional violence that attended the history of territorial conquest and colonization, the annexation of people and land according to the terms of the social contract which brought into alliance state policies and capitalist expansionist

interest. The revolt against the degrading revisions of land titles given to Mexican settlers is voiced by Señora Moreno, the resilient landowner who bears witness to the darker side of what has been celebrated as one of the most important myth and symbol of the American culture: the west frontier: "Any day, she said, the United States Government might send out a new land Commission to examine the decrees of the first, and revoke such as they saw fit. Once a thief, always a thief. Nobody need feel himself safe under American rule. There was no knowing what might happen any day; and year by year the lines of sadness, resentment, anxiety and antagonism deepened on the Senora's fast aging face" (13). In comparison with the remarkable characterization of Señora Moreno, Ramona's characterization as a typical romantic heroine seems to place her in the shadow of the former. Yet, as the story unfolds, her stature changes as she grows into a strong, self-determined woman who bears the burden of her mongrel blood and fights for her dream of happiness against all odds. She endures the wasteland that threatens to engulf her life and the life of her daughter and resists assimilation as a racialized other by choosing to leave US land. Ramona figures thus, a radical alterity, an unassimilated, suffering but resistant other, forced into nomadism and exile by the dispossession of home and identity.

The novel may be regarded as a counter-narrative of identity, in as much as the intertext that shapes its narrative logic disturbs and displace canonical representations of the national subject whose identity is predicated on the domestication/erasure of differences. It performs an intervention at the level of a critical reinterpretation of historical facts that destabilize the official discourse of American freedom and democracy by exposing the farce of its universalization in the narratives of progress, civilization and bourgeois enlightenment which only produced subjectivities compatible with the project of nation-building. From this perspective, its textual politics interrupts the pedagogical discourse of nationness based on the romantic integration of land and people under the principle of the land of the free. Some twenty years later, in 1903, Jackson's novel would find a resonance in the words of a representative member of the black intelligentsia, W.E.B. Du Bois who, in his book *The Souls of Black Folks*, stated: "Freedom is to us a mockery, ... and liberty a lie" (51).

Jackson's novel is one example of how women's writings produce different signs of identity and meaning, other interpretations of belongingness

and sociality that contest the production of hegemonic subjectivities engendered by the mechanisms of interpellation present in master narratives of nationhood.⁴ The fact that she was a white woman might raise the question, delicate from the standpoint of contemporary theories, of her narrative's place of enunciation regarding the other who is the object of her narration. In her favor, we might argue that she spoke about the other but never intended to assume the place of the other or speak from this position. Her subject positionality as an interested narrator is articulated through negotiations between self and other. Her narrator makes clear where she stands and never blurs the boundaries of differences, which does not prevent her, however, from assuming ideological affiliations that underscore her compassion and solidarity towards the American Indian nations. This was, by all means, no minor achievement for a middle class white woman in the context of XIX century American culture.

Considering all that *Ramona* stands for, it comes as no surprise the fact that it has not deserved serious academic treatment or a better place in the construct of American literary history. The challenge for feminist criticism is to affirm the importance of *Ramona's* textual liminality in relation to the American canon and to restore, to the present, the buried text of the culture's fundamental history, what has been repressed and pushed to the zone of oblivion and forgetfulness and lies dormant as its political unconscious. Tracking down lost and neglected narratives that were published but have remained marginalized or deauthorized in the historical accounts of the institutionalized national culture is part of feminist criticism's effort to intervene in hegemonic historiography. This is to say that, by engendering new insights and building other knowledges

⁴ This is a reference to the notions developed by Homi Bhabha (1994) in his *The Location of Culture*. In his theoretical proposal of the nation as narration, Bhabha argues that the concept of the "peoples" emerges within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement that articulates the tension between representing the people as an *a priori* historical presence, a pedagogical object, and constructing the people in the performance of narrative, its "enunciatory" present. According to him "the performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* by casting a shadow between the people as 'image' and its differentiating sign of Self" (147-48).

on the past, feminist critique challenges the ideological premisses that has maintained the institutional apparatus of nation-building and the cultural determinations of codes of interpretation and value judgement inscribed in the literary and academic culture. Such a move means, ultimately, to bring the battle over values and beliefs to bear on the genealogy of national narratives, both in terms of its politics of representation and of the values that gave it legitimacy.

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In and Out the Global Village: Gender Relations in a Cosmopolitan World

Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, CNPq

The feminization of culture, thus, became a feminist revision of culture, specializing in bringing women from the margins of history to the center of academic attention.

Rey Chow

If cross-cultural movements are nowadays the basis upon which our societies are structured, one of our greatest challenges today is to try to understand the circumstances under which they happen and, above all, what their consequences are. The transnational flow of subjects and peoples beyond delineated borders, frontiers and spaces has led to the questioning of the belief in a fixed and univocal concept of a nation (as Benedict Anderson argues), in a centralized national identity and in the notion of cultural authenticity—beliefs that have been central to the establishment of a national literary tradition in many countries. Today, however, the notions of displacement and deterritorialization, often understood as, “the detachment of knowledge, action, information, and identity from a specific place or physical source,” as Hoffman defines it, have predominated in contemporary literary production, forcing a revision in the way we discuss national literatures (44).

In this context, it is relevant to observe how the migratory movements and experiences in transit define the present transnational scenario and how contemporary writers undertake the task of recording the experience of mobility from different perspectives, be it an internal/inward movement, through domestic mobility, or an external/outbound one, through the

displacement across borders. Cross cultural movements very often take place in the form of migrant and diasporic literatures, either through the migrant that looks inwardly at the new culture, the one that looks outwardly to the place of so-called “origin” or the one that is caught in-between, in transit between worlds, spaces, languages, and perceptions. Mobility also often provides a view from the outside in—as outsiders look in—or inside out—as located subjects look out at varied geopolitical spaces.

In this context, many contemporary writers have recently focused on the production of transcultural fictions that negotiate new possibilities of locations and positionings, new identities in translocal and transnational movements and, by doing so, they have engendered new perceptions of the often multiple societies and cultures with which they inevitably become associated. A questioning of the effects of mobility often brings to the fore the undeniable fact that transnational and translocal movements may change not only the experience of subjects in transit and their perception of a place, but, first and foremost, they influence the experience of those who inhabit those spaces on a more permanent basis, that is, those who “stay put” or the “natives” who also have to deal with the impacts and consequences of transnational movements (Brah 209).

Seen from this perspective, identity and place become deeply interconnected in the ambivalent experiences of subjects in transit. As James Clifford points out, “in cosmopolitan perspective, identity is never only about location.... Identity is also, inescapably, about displacement and relocation, the experience of sustaining and mediating complex affiliations, multiple attachments” (“Mixed Feelings” 369). In other words, identities or the formation of subjectivities become, in our contemporary world, a process in flux, a temporary belonging rather than a unifying concept. It is possible, therefore, to speak not of a national or personal identity/subjectivity *per se* but of identities that will be defined by a process of being in the world—a kind of transient citizenship, a situatedness that points to how subjects situate and position themselves in a specific spatial context. The experience of culture mobility is, above all, not only a historical condition but also an intellectual reality, as Rey Chow puts it, “the reality of being an intellectual” (15) in our contemporary world. In the case of migrant or diasporic writings, culture mobility seems to be part not only of the fictional world described, but also of the writers’ active roles as intellectuals – often very active ones.

More importantly, Clifford states, diasporic discourses “reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity” (“Diasporas” 311). Our challenge today is, however, to ask how this new diaspora of the contemporaneity is different from other histories of dispersed peoples. For Clifford, diaspora consciousness is “constituted both negatively and positively” (“Diasporas” 311) in that the modern diaspora partakes of a double logic in the sense that it often resists and uses hegemonic forces. Several contemporary critics share Clifford’s ambivalent feeling towards diasporic movements. “The same geographical space,” Avtar Brah, for example, states, “comes to articulate different histories and meanings, such that ‘home’ can simultaneously be a place of safety and terror” (207).

In this new contemporary paradigm, feminist literary criticism and gender studies have played a central role in addressing new challenges brought about by this change of perspective, often problematized in works by contemporary women writers that discuss the issue of gender relations in a transnational scenario. We may notice how contemporary writers, who were, until recently, mostly concerned about presenting the predicament and dilemmas of living in transit, now approach the issue through a variety of topics, regarding the role of women and gender relations in this new contemporary socio-cultural scenario. As Spivak puts it, “if the colonial subject was largely a class subject, and if the subject of post-coloniality was variously racialised, then the subject of globalisation is gendered” (“Claiming Transformation” 123). Spivak’s argument calls our attention to the role of women as the target of international civil societies that becomes incorporated as an integral part of the global project for the establishment of a new social and economic order (“Claiming Transformation” 123).

It interests me how we can approach the challenge of discussing contemporary literature by women in view of these phenomena. As Diana Brydon puts it, it is not enough to reject these issues arguing against the disastrous effect of globalization. It is necessary to address the complexity of the notion and, consequently, to devise means to create productive, engaging counter-discourses or discourses that create the possibility of agency (61-63). In this present scenario, it is important to address the roles of cosmopolitan intellectual women that envisage this phenomenon

through the consequences and the challenges it brings to gender relations and how the process itself has produced effects within and beyond the category of gender.

Contemporary diasporic women writers usually address gender issues as they portray the discursive construction of subjects in a context of cultural and social displacement, transnational dialogues and diversified forms of cultural contacts. Despite living in national states and assuming a “national” citizenship, they bring their experience as “ex-centric” (Hutcheon 12) and hyphenated subjects to their literary production; thus, contributing to question values and destabilize concepts, such as that of the nation. They invariably offer a distinctive and subjective perception of the country they now live in—a perception that is unavoidably informed by their gendered diasporic experience.

As part of a “new diaspora”—a term employed by Gayatri Spivak to explain this contemporary migratory phenomenon—, these narratives depict the central role that women play in this new social-cultural context (“Diasporas” 249-52). For Clifford, keeping in mind gender as a category for analysis of forms of dislocation provides a powerful insight into the experience of diaspora. It is, therefore, necessary, in his view, to consider the effects of diaspora experience in gender relations (“Diasporas” 313-14). Along the same lines, Spivak argues that women as diasporic subjects are placed in a highly uneasy and rather questionable position. For Spivak, this new diaspora of contemporaneity, as opposed to the old one that was the result of religious oppression, war, slavery, imperialist politics, has as a new element the differentiating role of women. Nevertheless, despite the role of women as a key figure in this new diaspora, she stresses the fact that it is important to consider the different forms of oppression that women all over the world suffer, but “not in the same way” (“Diasporas” 249-52).

Overall, as several critics have observed, women play a crucial role in this new diaspora as “this group of gendered outsiders inside are much in demand by the transnational agencies of globalization for employment and collaboration” (Spivak, “Diasporas” 251). Brah also observes that this is part of a phenomenon that she terms “feminisation of migration,” in the sense that “women comprise a growing segment of migrations in all regions and all types of migration” (179). Marx adds that, in fact, what we can observe nowadays is that there is a “feminization of globalization” as women have become the most valuable commodity in the global market

(1-3). According to Spivak, however, these gendered diasporic subjects should think of themselves “not as victims below but agents above, resisting the consequences of globalization as well as redressing the cultural vicissitudes of migrancy” (“Diasporas” 251). In her words, instead of accepting a victimized role in the process, diasporic women, as the subjects that are most alienated from a situation of agency in civil society, should resist being incorporated into this new system by adopting the role of actors in a process she terms “transnational literacy” (Spivak, *Critique* 4).

At this point, I would like to cite a quote from the novel *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali, a writer born in Bangladesh who has lived in England since she was three years old, and whose first work became an immediate best seller in view of the contemporary appeal of its subject matter. What interests me in this case is the introductory passage from the novel that addresses precisely the notion mentioned earlier by Spivak, regarding women’s role in the present transnational world. The third person narrative voice describes the transformation the major character, Nazneen, goes through as a consequence of the dislocation she is, at first, forced to undergo:

What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle, and challenge. So that, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and been fated a young and demanding love, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (5)

However, agency in this case, despite its “positive” outcome for the life of the major character, comes as a surprise and, contradictorily, is not less painful than her previous condition because it entails a major change and in a whole structure of thought and gender relations – it is, nevertheless, a given under these circumstances, in the sense that, for this character and many others, there is no way back.

Nevertheless, as Spivak, Kamboureli and Chow have pointed out, one has to be aware of the danger of generalizing women’s experience and using the actions of women who resist and reject being incorporated into their system as standing/speaking for all women. Each situation, despite

the similarities, is unique and has to be viewed as possibilities of analyzing and theorizing the many experiences of women under diasporic conditions. Ella Shohat observes that the traumatic event of 9/11 has produced an urgency regarding the direction taken by multicultural and transnational feminisms that had developed in the previous decade. She adds that a feminist relational and multicultural project must at this point rethink the concepts of identities, the role of intellectuals and interdisciplinarity (20). In this sense, Shohat privileges a relational analysis and a multi-perspective of feminist studies, instead of an analysis that focuses upon specific locations (20). For Shohat, it is not a matter only of thinking difference in gender perspectives that are often still attached to essentialist notions of gender relations and behavior, but rather to propose to engage in “dialogical encounters of difference” through different viewpoints and positions that can be contrasted and theorized (20).

I would like now to go back to the notion of feminization of diaspora, referred to by Brah, by citing a quote from a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indo-American writer that also discusses the global movements of contemporary societies. In her novel, *The Namesake* (2003), Lahiri depicts the experience of migration and diaspora precisely in terms of feminization. As the narrative voice states, regarding the feelings of one of her female characters:

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts. It is an ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers, the same combination of pity and respect. (49-50)

The diasporic experience is felt, in this case, through the female body, one that is, not only gendered but also pregnant. By comparing the experience of diaspora to pregnancy, the female character expresses, in a meaningful way, the intrinsic relation, mentioned above in theoretical terms, between this new diaspora and the experiences of women.

Likewise, in *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), the Caribbean-Canadian writer, Dionne Brand, focuses specifically on the experiences of

women characters as the movement of spatial dislocation becomes often a means of questioning the construction of gender identities. Diaspora space for these characters is not only constitutive of a movement of people in transit but rather the possibility of challenging the notion of stable national and personal identities under diasporic conditions. In this novel, Brand tells the story of two female characters, Elizete and Verlia, as they move from their Caribbean island to Toronto in search for a better way of life to arrive there not only homeless, but also “countryless, landless, nameless” (48). They seem to be fully aware of the role women have been playing in this new diaspora, as the quote below shows: “These women, our mothers, a whole generation of them, left us. They went to England or America or Canada or some big city as fast as their wit would get them there because they were women and all they had to live on was wit since nobody considers them whole people. They scraped money together. . . . They put it away coin by coin” (230). Like the quote from *The Namesake*, this one also makes reference to the feminization of migration and of globalization by highlighting the fact that women form a growing segment in contemporary globalized diaspora. It also refers to an additional role that women have acquired in the present transnational world: as commodities and profitable goods whose labor is in great demand by cosmopolitan agents, as Spivak, Brah and Marx suggest.

The diasporic experience for these women and their consequent feeling of not belonging emerge symbolically from their spatial dislocation as migrant women—a displacement that mirrors their inability to fit in or to become part of a world from which they are alienated. For Verlia and Elizete, Toronto is a city divided by racial, gender and socio-economic differences and becomes emblematic of the experience of so many diasporic subjects that move along its streets.

By the same token, in *What We All Long For* (2005), Dionne Brand’s latest novel, Toronto appears as a central reference, as a cosmopolitan space which is the recipient of large waves of migrant movements and through which subjects in transit and also those who “stay put” converge. This time, however, Brand focuses on the post-diaspora generation, that is, that generation whose parents were part of this transnational movement, and which is Canadian born, despite their multiple affiliations – “They were born in the city of people born elsewhere” (20). Furthermore, although

the novel still tends to privilege a feminine perspective, here, unlike the other novels, Brand introduces a male character (Oku) that also has to deal with the consequences and outcomes of their parents' choice of living in transit, as well as with the new paradigm of gender relations. The four major characters in the novel (Tuyen, Carla, Oku, Jackie) are, from the start, presented as a post-diaspora generation that is always caught in the middle, trying to negotiate two versions of a world in continuous change:

They all, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie, felt as if they inhabited two countries—their parents' and their own. . . . Each left home in the morning as if making a long journey, untangling themselves from the seaweed of other shores wrapped around their parents. Breaking their doorways, they left the sleepwalk of their mothers and fathers and ran across the unobserved borders of the city, sliding across ice to arrive at their own birthplace—the city. (20)

Torn between two cultures, two perceptions of the world, these characters feel that they had “never been able to join in what their parents called ‘regular Canadian life’. The crucial piece, of course, was that they weren’t the required race” (47). It is clear from Brand’s portrayal of these characters that not only gender, but also race plays a major role in their experience in the city. In some ways, as their lives are tangled with the city that becomes part of their own experience of (not) belonging, they become “defined by the city” (66). Above all, they feel they are linked to “the city’s heterogeneity” (142), to its “polyphonic murmuring” (149). Nevertheless, they face it with some “heterogeneous baggage” (5) of their own – some baggage or luggage that is quite different from that of their parents’, especially in the way gender relations are reconfigured in their experiences. The reference to the “heterogeneous baggage” they carry over reminds us of Rosemary George’s association of living in transit with what each diasporic subject or migrant takes along in this process of mobility: the metaphor of luggage carries a meaning both material and spiritual” (8).

As the quotes above show, the Toronto portrayed in this novel, unlike the segregated one from *In Another Place Not Here*, reminds us of a cosmopolitan space and may be said to embody McLuhan’s concept of the “global village,” a kind of vast global information space that is interconnected in such a way that the local and global eventually meet. It lacks, however,

McLuhan's original laudatory tone. In this case, Toronto is the place in which a plethora of transnational workers live, in which "a stream of identities flowed": "there are Bulgarian mechanics, there are Eritrean accountants, Colombian café owners, Latvian book publishers, Welsh roofers ... Haitian and Bengali taxi drivers with Irish dispatchers" (5). They all seem to be "[t]rying to step across the borders of who they were ... They were, in fact, borderless" (213). Toronto is also the place in which the unexpected happens and where gender relations become more flexible and women have more, and different, choices regarding their lives than their mothers did before them, as the portrayal of the artist Tuyen, born to Vietnamese parents, show. She is described as "the most daring of the friends. By eighteen Tuyen had already moved out.... Tuyen was androgynous, a beautiful, perfect mix of the feminine and the masculine" (22). It is up to this androgynous and transgressive female character to collect the "many longings" of this cosmopolitan and transnational city and insert it into an installation that becomes representative of wishes and desires of its transcultural citizens.

Brand seems to give us in the two novels mentioned above two different models through which the experiences of subjects in transit are portrayed in gender terms—both highly relevant for the context of contemporary literature. On the one hand, in *Another Place, Not Here*, the focus lies on the diasporic movement of subjects in transit, especially through the depiction of the political undermining of women in these conditions. On the other hand, in *What We All Long For*, Brand explores a broader concept of mobility which can be understood as a form of cosmopolitanism, one, however, that still subsumes gender as a major category for analysis, albeit of a quite different nature.

In this sense, Brand's most recent novel takes the reader through the consequences of diaspora, in a cosmopolitanism (in the terms discussed by Robbins' and Appadurai's notions) that affects all the characters, including in gender terms. Here, we do not see the "urgency" that predominates in the previous novel, but rather the difficulty and the contradictions and ambiguities imbricated in the intricacies of gender relations in an individual level. In the end, Tuyen's installation about the "longings of the city" (160), besides giving the novel its title, reflects precisely the tone of the novel in the sense that it portrays Toronto as a city

“full of longings” (151) that comes from different peoples and divergent experiences. They are, nevertheless, individual longings, not collective and political ones as we see in *In Another Place Not Here*.

As we could observe from the references above, the contemporary women writers discussed here, as well as several others, that address the issue of the new diasporas, have often opted to foreground the way present-day transnational movements have influenced and affected the relations among individuals and the situation of women in society. Likewise, contemporary feminist literary criticism, gender studies and women’s writings have not only addressed the most complex and controversial issues in our transnational scenario, but have also become the instruments that have fostered a review of literary studies in line with what Stuart Hall once mentioned regarding cultural studies (268). Feminist literary criticism has forced a major change of direction in the discipline of literature by challenging some of the most solidified concepts about gender relations in our presently globalized world. This can also be observed in the way theoreticians and writers alike have faced one of the major challenges in the field by discussing the persistent gendered trait of contemporary diasporas.

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Hypertext, Information Overload, and the Death of Literature

Sérgio Luiz P. Bellei
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Introduction

The problem I want to address here is that of the possible future of literature at the historical moment in which this form of textuality we have learned to call “hypertext” is swiftly becoming hegemonic¹ and transforming or replacing previous textual practices, particularly those associated with printing. Like all technological devices, information processing machines do not operate in a purely instrumental way, as a tool to increase production and speed. They operate also and primarily in the mode of what Heidegger called “enframing” (“Gestell”), which refers to the power technology has of creating a new environment, and of changing cultural practices, social values, human behaviour, and the existing balance of power (324). It is in this sense, for instance, that the invention of the clock restructured natural time (sunrise, daylight, night, seasons) and its perception into a numerical sequence that was unknown in previous times, and eventually led to the productive control of labor time and,

¹ I use the word “hegemony” less in the sense of “dominance of one group over others” than in the sense of “cultural control that affects commonplace patterns of thought.” In this context, hegemony controls the way new ideas are naturalized or, conversely, rejected by a social group. It alters notions of common sense in a given society and results in the empowerment of specific cultural beliefs, values and practices, at the same time that it excludes other values and practices.

ultimately, to the identification of time and money, as in “time is money”; or that the information-processing machine called print radically restructured the notion of knowledge, and paved the way for the appearance of new cultural formations (such as the novel) and the disappearance of others (such as oral narratives).

In his classic study of Postmodern knowledge, Jean-François Lyotard observed that, along with this hegemony of computers “comes a certain logic, and therefore a set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as “knowledge statements” (4). An existing cultural form of knowledge can either “fit the new channels,” because it can be translated “into quantities of information,” or it will become obsolete. In the last thirty years, of course, a number of cultural practices have either become obsolete, or disappeared. I suspect, for example, that with the widespread use of e-mails, letter writing is quickly becoming history. And Derrida has argued that, had e-mail been available to Freud and his patients, psychoanalysis as we know it today would not exist (*Archive Fever* 17).

What, then, happens to the practice of print based literature in the age of hypertext and information processing machines? Will it survive? Will it be transformed, and, if so, in what ways? To ask these questions, of course, involves a tentative definition of the nature of hypertext, the nature of literature or, more precisely, of the literary event, and, finally, a tentative exploration of the difference between them.

The hypertext and its user

Let me turn, then, to the question of hypertext. Two names are usually mentioned in discussions of the definition of hypertext: those of Ted Nelson in the early sixties, and Vannevar Bush, in 1945. Nelson, who presumably used the word for the first time, usually receives more attention than Bush. I believe, however, that one can learn more about hypertext from Bush, who discussed the concept before the word was invented, than from Nelson. Nelson’s definition is purely descriptive and disarmingly simple: hypertext, he says, is the kind of “non-sequential writing” in which “a series of text chunks connected by links... offer the reader different pathways” (2). There is always a price to pay for descriptive, oversimplified definitions: they usually occlude more than they reveal. In this case, what

Nelson's definition amounts to is what I called before the instrumental view of technology: a descriptive, essentialist definition of what all hypertexts share in common (connectivity) and of what you can do with it (follow alternative pathways). This oversimplified view of technology is usually followed by another dangerous oversimplification, usually presented as the good and the evil sides of technology: you can use the connectivity of this vast hypertext known as the Internet to provide millions of people with useful information, or you can use it for internet crime.

Nelson's definition then fails to provide a view of hypertext technology as a form of enframing, which would involve an understanding not only of what we can do with hypertext, but of what hypertexts can do to us as we are framed and perhaps trapped by its digital logic. Vannevar Bush, on the other hand, provides us with an understanding of hypertext not only in terms of what it can do, but also in terms of its specific historical conditions of enframing. Bush, in other words, helps us to understand how the development of this new form of textuality appears as a response to certain social, cultural and political pressures, and, in particular, as a response to the postwar need to come to grips with an overproduction of knowledge and information that was quickly growing out of control. Hypertext is here understood not simply as an instrument for the exercise of connectivity, but as a mechanical device meant to meet certain specific historical demands and capable of promoting, so to speak, environmental changes that would have an impact on cultural practices, particularly on the cultural practices related to science and knowledge production.

Bush's reputation today rests on what I think are two interrelated achievements: his contribution to the development of the digital age and, perhaps more importantly, his successful efforts to create a relationship between the U. S. government, the military, and the scientific establishment during and after World War II. In the early forties, together with other American scientists, and with the support of President Roosevelt, he participated in the efforts to found what would become the NDRC (National Defense Research Committee), an organization in charge of bringing together government, military, business and scientific leaders to coordinate military research. Bush was also one of the scientists involved in the Manhattan Project, devoted to the production of the first atomic bomb.

I want to call attention to these biographical details both because they are related to his achievement in the area of digital research, and

because they do suggest that the origins of hypertext were not associated with a liberal or even a libertarian agenda, or with the promotion of the freedom of language, presumably liberated at last, as early studies of hypertext often suggested, from the linear tyranny of the book. It was rather associated with far less noble pursuits, such as the postwar effort to control information, and the power which comes with it, whether in science, politics, or military practices. As a scientist involved in the war effort, Bush believed firmly in the need for the close association between “scientific research” and military matters. After the war, this belief was strengthened rather than abated: in an essay published in 1945 (“Science, the endless frontier”), he proposed the establishment of a National Research Foundation devoted, among other things, to the support of “long-range research on military matters” (“Science” 28). This is also the year when he published his major contribution to hypertext theory (even though the term did not exist at the time), in an essay called “As We May Think.” The essay addresses the question of how to deal with a growing accumulation of information and knowledge that could no longer be grasped by human memory alone. Confronted with “a growing mountain of research,” Bush complained, scientists and investigators are “staggered by the findings and conclusions of thousands of other workers – conclusions which [they] cannot find time to grasp, much less to remember, as they appear” (“As we may think” 2). For Bush, however, this limitation of human memory could be compensated by a machine designed to enhance and expand it. The machine would, to put it simply, allow the user to store and retrieve information from a databank of interconnected blocks of meaning. He called this memory expansion device “memex,” an information processing machine which he described as a desk with viewing screens, a keyboard, selection buttons and levers and information stored in microfilms. Had Bush used the word “databanks” instead of “microfilms,” which was the technology available at the time he wrote his essay, his words could easily be applied to computers. Anyone capable of using the memex in 1945 would probably feel comfortable enough to surf the web today, as the structure of both devices is the same. If the user of the memex, for example, is interested in “the origins and properties of the bow and arrow,” all he has to do to learn more is to operate the levers and buttons of the machine to display on the screen selected information from “the dozens of possibly pertinent books and articles in his memex” (“As We May Think” 3):

First he runs through an encyclopedia, finds an interesting but sketchy article, leaves it projected. Next, in a history, he finds another pertinent item, and ties the two together. Thus he goes, building a trail of many items. Occasionally he inserts a comment of his own, either linking it into the main trail or joining it by a side trail to a particular item... Thus he builds a trail of his interest through the maze of materials available to him. (15)

Bush might well have coined the expression that computer users of today come across again and again: "for more information, press enter." Both the memex user and the Internet surfer of today must skip through the interconnected material of a databank to select relevant material ("chunks of text," as Ted Nelson would say later) which is then visualized on the screen, in the form of collated texts. And both, here and there, insert a comment of their own.

What is germane to my argument here is the understanding of hypertext as a prosthesis, a mechanical device to replace a missing or insufficient body part, human memory in this case, with the purpose to control expanding information that is getting out of hand. Hypertext is, therefore, that supplement of human memory that is required whenever the information to be processed exceeds human capacity, whether this supplement is called a dictionary, an encyclopedia, or a search engine called "Google." What is involved in all cases is, as Bush saw, is "a provision whereby any item may be caused at will to select immediately and automatically another" (15). Nor did he fail to anticipate that this prosthetic form of textuality would become more and more indispensable in the near future, given the growing complexity of modern civilization. Without this new information processing machine, human knowledge would be doomed to be "bogged down" by a failure of human memory (16). Science, in particular, would fail to deliver its goods, as it would no longer be able to come to grips with the growing mountain of accumulated knowledge. "There may be," he observes, "millions of fine thoughts, and the account of the experience on which they are based, all encased within [libraries]; but if the scholar can get at only one a week by diligent search, his syntheses are not likely to keep up with the current scene" (13).

What, then, is the ideal reader of this form of textuality that operates as a prosthesis designed to compensate for the limitations of human

memory? Hypertext is certainly appropriate for consulting encyclopedias and dictionaries, for the internet surfer in search of images and texts to illustrate a particular argument, for an amazon.com customer in search of books related to his research, or for a credit card user that must have his purchase authorized by mechanical access to the details of his bank account stored anywhere in the world, in the form of digital data. It may also be useful for readers of literature interested in collecting information on a particular writer such as, for example, William Blake. But none of these practices can be properly called reading. One does not, after all, read a dictionary. Umberto Eco has suggested that hypertext is not really a kind of text that is appropriate for the practice of reading, but a system for consultation. A “system,” for Eco, is composed of a large but finite system of signs which has an almost endless combinatory potential, such as the alphabet (2). In “The Library of Babel” (to which, by the way, the Internet has often been compared), Jorge Luis Borges gave the perfect example of this system marked by an almost endless combinatory potential: an imaginary library containing all books and writings from the past, present and future because one can find on its shelves all possible combinations of the 23 letters of the alphabet. Borges’s library is, indeed, a vast hypertext system in which every combination of letters has impossibly been actualized, so that this article that I am writing was already on its shelves, in several versions, before I wrote it, and indeed before I even considered the possibility of writing it. So much for originality. Eco suggests that the nature of hypertext as a system of combinations of signs makes it an ideal form of textuality for consultation, but not necessarily for reading.² The reader of

² Vannevar Bush was very much aware of the significance of the memex for the consultation of combinatory systems such as an encyclopedia. He predicted that, with the development of automated information processing machines, “wholly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready made with a mesh of associative trails running through them, ready to be dropped into the memex and there amplified. The lawyer has at his touch the associated opinions and decisions of his whole experience, and of the experience of friends and authorities.... The physician, puzzled by a patient’s reactions, strikes the trail established in studying an earlier similar case, and runs rapidly through analogous case histories, with wide references of the classics for the pertinent anatomy and histology....” (“As We May Think” 16).

texts, as opposed to the reader of hypertexts, works with a specific combination of the system of signs produced according to specific rules of combination that include some possibilities and exclude others: a sequence of signs such as “stm” is not a text, but a possible combination of the system (Eco 2). If I add two vowels to the sequence and produce the word “system,” then I have a text for reading, even if this text can be interpreted in different ways. Eco reminds us that systems such as the alphabet are so rich in combinations that they may produce in the user the *illusion* of freedom. Early theorists of hypertext, as I suggested before, praised the hypertext as a major occasion for the experience of freedom. But if Eco is right, as I think he is, there is no such thing as real freedom in consulting hypertexts because the system programs in advance both a limited, even if very large, repertoire, and all its possibilities of combination.

But if the hypertext as a prosthesis of human memory differs from texts in general, it must differ also, and more significantly, from this particular kind of textuality that we call literary writing. And, more importantly, if literary texts are hypertextualized, there must be a difference between reading literature and reading literature in hypertext. This difference, of course, can only be understood more precisely if we return, as a preliminary step, to the always vexing question of the definition of literature.

The literary text and its reader

Perhaps the most productive way to approach the problem of defining literature today is to say right away that it is not a problem at all because it is a false problem: it should not even be stated in the first place. To ask the question “what is literature?” leads nowhere because there is no “whatness,” or essence, of literature to begin with. Every attempt to define the specificity of literature by placing it on the outside of something else did not work well because, sooner or later, what was supposed to be outside was always already inside. Literature has consistently failed to be defined as that which is outside of facts, or of pragmatic discourses, or of ordinary speech, because history has often proved fictional, poems have often been used pragmatically, and literariness as a fact of history changes from time to time. Literature, as Terry Eagleton has concisely and conveniently

described in his bestselling book *Literary Theory* (1983), “does not exist in the sense that insects do” (17). It is rather a cultural construction ideologically constituted by historical value judgements, and its existence must be explained in *functional* rather than *ontological* terms: it tells us, Eagleton concludes, “about what we do, not about the fixed being of things” (8).

Given the impossibility of saying what literature is, we must resign ourselves to simply accepting its existence. Literature happens, it comes to pass, it comes and passes, and may eventually pass away. In a passage meant to ridicule the formalist effort to identify the defamiliarizing effect of literature, Eagleton gives an example of this coming to pass of the literary text. “If you approach me at a bus stop,” he says “and murmur ‘Thou still unravished bride of quietness’, then I am instantly aware that I am in the presence of the literary” (2). But having acknowledged “the presence of the literary,” Eagleton stops short of saying anything about what I do, or what happens to me, or to you for that matter, once we are in the presence of the literary as individuals, or as subjects. Am I simply a consumer of a commodity produced by the literary market? Although it is certainly possible to answer yes to this question, the answer does not tell the whole story. Consumers consume literature in different ways, and it is even possible, as Barthes has suggested in his reading of Balzac and elsewhere, that literature may well be a form of discourse that resists consumption. This form of being in the presence of literature not as a consumer, but as someone that experiences something other than consumption is what I want to emphasize here, as the necessary preliminary step in the attempt to distinguish the “literary experience” from “hypertextualized literature.” In a nutshell, the distinction is that between, on the one hand, literature as primarily an event (and not an object) to be uniquely experienced, at a particular historical moment, by you and me, and the literary hypertext, on the other, as primarily a prosthetic device carefully fabricated to be consumed as a commodity in the market. Of course the distinction is not absolute, as there are overlaps from one concept to the other. Still, as I will argue, it is not a useless distinction either.

If literature is an event in which you and I experience, in different ways, a certain historical arrangement of words that comes to pass and may pass away, what then is this arrangement, and what is the experience of it as an event that, by definition, is unique? Historically understood, this

arrangement of words that we call literature today is a relatively recent invention: it has existed for about three hundred years, and, as will be discussed later, is increasingly giving signs of exhaustion and, perhaps, of being on the verge of collapse from severe fatigue.³ From the eighteenth century on, Literature has usually signified those *printed* texts produced by the creative imagination of, preferably but not exclusively, a genius that is not so much a *poietés* (that is to say, a maker in the original sense of the word) as an inventor. And what the creative genius invents amounts to, as Alvin Kernan has suggested, an expression of what remains of beauty in a world increasingly dominated by scientific rationalism (computers included), by the machine and industrialization, and by consumerism and materialism. The creative imagination of the genius resists these manifestations of decadence by diving into the “divine energy existing in the depths of [his] authentic self” with the purpose of bringing new meaning into a decayed world (Kernan 19). An antidote to the horrors of rationalism, science and the machine, this new meaning would be often associated with the values of the primitive, the irrational, nature, or the unconscious. The word “new” is also very significant here, as it points to the literary meaning to be expressed as an unveiling and as a revelation. Wordsworth’s “spots of time” and James Joyce’s “epiphanies,” of course, are the two most

³ The historical specificity that marks this literary production as different from previous forms of expression have been exhaustively explored, particularly by critics that expanded on Raymond Williams’s groundbreaking insights on the difficulty of defining literature and culture (See, in particular, *Marxism and Literature* 49-50). Literature as we understand it today, for instance, can hardly be understood except as profoundly marked by the cultural changes associated with the hegemony of print, consolidated in the eighteenth century. These changes include the spread of literacy, the possibility of universal education, the appearance of a new market for books, the development of nation-states and national literatures, the modern research university, the rise of democracies and the right to say anything (not always enforced, of course), a new sense of the self developed in a complex history from Descartes through Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud and beyond, and, finally, a new sense of author, authorship and genius closely associated with the laws of copyright.

remarkable examples of the ways in which newness enters a decayed world through art.

In this historical context of the last three hundred years, then, the job of the artist has been to contribute to that “culture of redemption,” which Leo Bersani has recently defined as marked by the belief that “a certain type of repetition of experience in art repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience” (1). No matter how diverse in their writings, styles and world views, Romantic and modern writers such as Dickens, Blake, Flaubert, Elliot, and Pound share this effort to rescue and, if possible, redeem what e. e. cummings called “this busy monster, manunkind” (397). There is damage and degradation, as Kernan reminds us, to be criticized and, if possible, redeemed, in the Yonville of Flaubert, the Satanic London of Blake, the Coketown of Dickens, the “unreal city” of Eliot, or the Paris subway of Pound. And there are fallen beings inhabiting these places and living meaningless lives, a Prufrock here, a Madam Bovary there, a hollow man elsewhere. Repair and redemption of this manunkind would only happen, if at all, if readers could be exposed to “a certain type of repetition of experience in art” (Bersani 1).

What literature does, then, is to try to change and repair the reader, and by extension culture itself, as it exposes them to the revelation to be experienced in art. Producing this revelation as an alternative to scientific rationalism, as I suggested before, requires a certain emphasis on the use of language not so much for what it can say or tell explicitly (that would be the rational use of language), but for what it can suggest or show, and on the need for a poetics that increasingly chooses to specialize in shunning allegory and transparency in order to emphasize symbolism, metaphor and density. This kind of poetics, of course, spells trouble for the reader in search of closures and quick answers, as she is more often than not invited to become involved in a search of meaning that, because unleashed by the vagueness of suggestions rather than statements, tends to lead to possibilities without end.

What is then the ideal reader of literature conceived as an event to be experienced as possibilities without end? For the French critic Maurice Blanchot, the experience of this reader is analogous to that of Ulysses, as he takes precautions to listen to the song of the sirens without, however, suffering any harm. In a powerful reading of Blanchot, Hillis Miller

observes that the siren's song is "always proleptic," that is, it is *always* assigned to a time that precedes its real happening. The word "always" here points to an infinite regression: the song remains forever a promise of a song to come in the form of a final presence that remains absent forever. Of course, the voice that we hear behind Miller's reading Blanchot (and behind my reading of both) is the voice of Jacques Derrida, for whom, predictably, literature should be understood as a specter, or as a "spectral apparition" ("Shibboleth" 58; *Specters* 6) that is made real by flesh and blood but in which flesh and blood must disappear, as Joseph Kronick has concisely put it, "right away in the apparition" (2, 4). Literature, in other words, is the promise of the ghost to come, but because the ghost is both the body and its denial, and because it can never be grasped, it signifies also "the ineluctable loss of the origin" (Kronick 4).

Like Ulysses, then, the reader in the presence of the literary, whether he is Eagleton at the bus stop, or you and me reading a book, is a ghost chaser (but never a ghost buster) and a listener of the song to come. Needless to say, this is not an experience of consumption, but an opportunity to come to grips with that uncontrollable otherness that, presumably, has the power to change you and me, perhaps even Eagleton, as readers of literature. It is no wonder then that we are afraid of ghosts, and that Ulysses insists on being tied to the mast of his ship. Reading as the unpredictable event of an encounter with the otherness that refuses to be domesticated involves the inevitable sense of uncertainty and loss, but also of surprise, in a reader that can never be sufficiently prepared for the song to come. This does not mean, of course, that one can dispense with all previous and laborious preparations that necessarily precede the act of reading. It means rather that this preparation, however extended and exhaustive, is necessary but always insufficient to respond fully to the unique event of individual reading. If, on the one hand, it is true that hypertext may be useful in this preparation for reading, as it provides us with easy access to a variety of contexts, it is also true that it amounts to a preparation only, radically different from reading as an encounter with the unexpected.

Reading literature means then, paradoxically, being prepared to be surprised again and again. And the reader, in being surprised by the otherness in the event of reading, undergoes a change, redefines one's own views, feelings, and perceptions, and has the carpet of his horizons of

expectations pulled from under his feet.⁴ This experience of the event in time and space, of course, escapes control and cannot be simulated by a machine, as is the case of the literary hypertext, which is about the immediate connections of meaning in a spatial dimension. Reading hypertexts, if it can be called reading at all, is a form of collating pre-programmed pathways of meaning in a spatially programmed environment, whereas reading literature involves the exposure of a reader, in time, to the unstable experience of walking in pathways that, so to speak, lead nowhere. It is unlikely that a computer will ever be programmed to produce this experience inherently marked by temporality and the unexpected: the event of reading resists being translated into a programming which must necessarily take place within the eternal present of a space of total predictability. Reading hypertext, then, is a form of experiencing a spatial form of collage, and it is therefore a practice of non-reading. Reading literature, on the other hand, is a form of experiencing the uncertainties of time, history, and mortality.

⁴ Georges Poulet has written extensively on the power the text has of affecting the reader. "Reading," he says, "is the act in which the subjective principle which I call *I* is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my *I*. I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within me" (45). To be "on loan to another," implies a crisis of subjectivity in which the subject of reading is both active and passive, dispossessed and powerful in her dispossession. Poulet claims that Rimbaud's famous words, "Je est un autre" describes accurately this alienated subjectivity. "Reading," Poulet explains, "is just that: a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images, ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters them and shelters them" (45). What, more precisely, is this "alien principle"? Poulet describes it "a subjectivity without objectivity," meaning by that "a subject which reveals itself to itself and [to the reader] in its transcendence relative to all which is reflected in it." He concludes his meditation on reading with the image of this "alien principle" as a ghost that haunts every critic in her quest for the "elucidation of works". The work of objective elucidation can only get you so far. After that, the critical work of elucidation, ...in order to accompany the mind in this effort of detachment from itself, needs to annihilate, or at least momentarily to forget, the objective elements of the work, and to elevate itself to the apprehension of a subjectivity without objectivity (49).

Reading literature in hypertext. Or, what hypertext can do to literature

I want to conclude by returning to the question of how hypertext can affect literature in the context I have just outlined. I have good news and bad news, but I want to give particular attention to the bad news, as I feel that this is the most urgent question to be addressed. The good news has to do with the immediate advantages of the Internet for the accumulation of hypertextualized literary texts online and for their immediate dissemination. As more and more hypertextualized literary texts are made available everyday to readers, teachers, and students all over the planet, it is obvious that never before so many have had so much easy access to a vast amount of texts with so little effort. And with professional hypertextualization, readers can access not only primary sources, but significant historical contexts and additional information. Nor is this a matter of quantity only, especially when the hypertextualization is expertly provided by distinguished scholars and with the financial and logistic support of powerful institutions, as is the case of the Blake Archives. I think it is safe to say that readers of Blake, today, will be better served by accessing the Archives than by consulting printed editions. Visit the Archive and you will, for instance, have immediate access, with the click of a mouse, to all the illustrations available that relate to the word "tiger," or the word "lamb." No printed edition of the poet can make available to the reader the amount of information, the ease of connections, and the facility of access provided by the multimedia Blake available online. Or consider the experience that is becoming more and more available worldwide today, of teachers and students in the wired classroom. Marjorie Perloff has recently commented on one such experience.

Teaching a graduate seminar "in avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century" in 1998, without using the Internet, she had a hard time assembling course materials, especially in cases involving the use of images or sound: the visual poems of Marinetti, sound poems, performance works. Teaching a similar course in a wired classroom seven years later was much easier, because most of the material was available online. "I brought my little laptop," she said, "and we were ready to go." Teacher and students had easy access to materials related to the Futurists in www.futurism.org.uk, and to other materials in the Museum of Modern Art Archives. "On this site," she observes, "one can click on individual

books and then turn the pages to see individual texts – much more than one can do at actual exhibits where the books are in glass cases” (Perloff 3).

This is indeed good news. In fact, it is so good that anyone suspecting there might be any bad news associated with it should be taken as suspect of being a new luddite or a technophobe, or a Jurassic traditionalist unworthy of serious attention. What could be wrong with this accumulation of hypertextualized literature and art online, especially if it is taken as an expansion of existing printed material for easier dissemination and easier manipulation? In this sense the Internet presents itself as a complement to the book, and the business of reading literature will go on as usual, only better. Marjorie Perloff, for one, endorses this view. The course she currently teaches on the avant-garde “is never based on electronic materials alone; it must always be supplemented by close reading of the poems and artworks themselves as well as by research in the library” (4). Far from opposing each other, digital resources and physical resources here complement each other in the best of all possible worlds: real libraries and electronic archives, hypertextual gathering of information as well as close reading. What is implied here is that the Internet is a tool to enhance already existing technologies, such as the technology of the book, not a replacement for them. “The Internet,” she concludes,

cannot replace the instructor’s intellectual organization of and response to the material in question: to treat it as a teaching tool is to remember that sometimes telling is better than showing. But used with a certain degree of skepticism and irony, Internet access can transform the classroom. Indeed, whether we like it or not, it has already done so (5).

I will take my chances of being labeled a Jurassic technophobe and suggest that there might be, in fact, some bad news associated with the wonders of hypertextual material accumulated online. But this can only be done if we are willing to think of technology not merely as a tool to do things faster and better but, in a tradition often associated with Heidegger and McLuhan, among others, as an environment, or enframing, or emplacement. Technologies and technologically produced textualities could then be thought of as emplacing devices, and what they emplace is not only objects, but also people. This technological emplacement reconfigures space, time, objects, people, culture, behaviours. Neil Postman conveniently

summarizes this view of technology in the first chapter of his *Technopoly*. “A new technology,” he observes,

does not add or subtract anything. It changes everything. In the year 1500, fifty years after the printing press was invented, we did not have Europe plus the printing press. We had a different Europe. After television, the United States was not America plus television; television gave a new coloration to every home, to every school, to every church, to every industry. (18)

The “new coloration” produced by new technologies, of course, depends on their hegemonic power. Television changed everything because it became hegemonic in relation to other media. If Postman is right, technologies that become hegemonic, such as electronic hypertextuality, do not necessarily operate as complements to older technologies, such as the printed book. “New technologies,” Postman claims,

compete with old ones – for time, for attention, for money, for prestige, but mostly for dominance of their world view.... And it is a fierce competition, as only ideological competitions can be. It is not merely a matter of tool against tool – the alphabet attacking ideographic writing, the printing press attacking the illuminated manuscript, the photograph attacking the art of painting, television attacking the printed world. When media make war against each other, it is a case of world-views in collision. (16)

If Postman is right, then we have to consider the possibility that electronic hypertext reading might eventually displace rather than complement literary reading as the kind of practice typical of the Gutenberg Era. In terms of my previous discussion, this means that collage and annotation as practiced by Vannevar Bush might well displace siren song listening as dangerously practiced by Ulysses. More specifically, if the hypertextual practice of searching databanks to produce a collage of materials to which annotations are added becomes dominant, and readers become increasingly motivated to see it as the natural way to read, then the experience of reading literature as a form of experiencing the uncertainty of a secret that cannot ever be fully revealed will tend to recede in the background. Thomas Frisk has suggested that, if not for other reasons, reading *Moby-Dick* interactively promotes a kind of reading that competes

with, rather than complements, other forms of readings because “a spurious feeling of accomplishment” is involved in hypertext reading. It is the accomplishment, for instance, of clicking on “white whale” or “Nantucket” and calling up “pictures, sounds, and assorted addenda.” The reader feels that he can now “demand things of this text”:

I don't submit to it in the same way as before, carefully constructing my own vision of it, what it means to me. I challenge it “explain yourself; give me more.” The subtle physical satisfactions of my interrogation – clicking, opening, a minute sort of video game – are not to be ignored. Yet paradoxically with such interactivity I am in a more passive position regarding the text. Although I can punch buttons to ramify and illustrate it, those enhancements don't deepen my involvement with, my responsibility to, or my own ideas about the text. Like a good consumer, I merely accept the repressive “choices” that are offered me.

This seductive entwining of power and passivity is undoubtedly the reason why a younger generation has less and less patience with bare text that's “just black and white and doesn't move....” Less and less time spent in reading can only hasten the day when a page of naked print seems as strange as a field plowed by oxen.⁵ (207)

⁵ Together with drastic changes in the meaning of reading, changes in writing are felt by many to be taking place. In his presidential address to the MLA in 1999, Edward Said complained that in the new electronic order, “which has made writing so much more easy, efficient, and available, as well as disposable,” students are writing more, but not necessarily better. “Whereas ten years ago one had to plead with students to produce eight to ten pages for a term paper, now one has to be absolutely despotic about not reading anything over fifteen pages. Student as well as faculty writing, with its rapid editing, transcribing, patching, and pasting potential, has developed a noticeable structural relaxation and very often an unattractive distension. You can write on a keyboard with only the effort required to press keys and editorial buttons; you can save, modify, adapt, and incorporate huge numbers of words seemingly without labor or sweat.... The result is a standardization of tone that has more or less done away with the quirkiness and carefully nurtured gestation of handwritten writing that one associates symbolically as well as actually not only with Freud but with the great literary figures contemporary with him such as Proust, Mann, Woolf, Pound, Joyce, and most of the other modernist giants” (Edward Said, “Presidential Address 1999: Humanism and Heroism,” *PMLA*, vol 11, number 3, May 2000, 285-291).

There is a difference, then, between experiencing the literary and reading literature as a practice of constantly pressing enter for more information. If this distinction makes sense, then it should be clear that the production of literature in hypertext promotes the practice of expanding and controlling the memory of literature, but not that of *reading literature*. And, as the practice of control becomes hegemonic, and more and more hypertextualized literature is stored in the Internet, we may well be tempted to identify reading with the collage of data to be displayed on the screen. Ultimately, this would amount to promoting the kind of reading exemplified by Vannevar Bush, to be followed by the deterioration of the practice of listening to the song of the sirens, or of chasing the ghost to come. I do not want to claim that this experience is inherently good, desirable, necessary, as it has its pitfalls too.

The culture of redemption, as Bersani has suggested, may well amount to an invitation to forget history, for example. True as this may be, it is also safe to say that the literary has enormously affected our understanding of culture and education, our sense of time and history, and indeed the meaning of what it is to be human, as an alternative way of life to what some have labeled “posthuman,” meaning by that the way of life of cyborgs with prosthetic memories in the Age of Information.

If the practice of listening to the siren’s song to come does recede to the background, then, will something important be lost? The answer to that question depends ultimately, I think, on whether we may or may not still value, in our days, literature as an experience of redemption which necessarily exposes us to irreducible otherness and, by implication, to our own limitations as subjectivities existing in time. Most people, I suppose, will agree today that these promises of redemption and repair did not do much to prevent the horrors of the last century, and will not certainly be enough to exorcise the new terrors to come in the new century. But it is still possible to believe that, if the experience of the encounter with otherness cannot change history, it can nevertheless perhaps be of help, with luck, in minimizing the damage a little. And it will do so by reminding us of the dangers involved in the overwhelming human impulse to control and to reduce difference to sameness. If literature is the arena where the relation to the irreducible other is staged, one might do worse today than to be exposed to it and to listen to the song to come.

T. S. Eliot remarked in the mid thirties that what I have been calling here, following Blanchot, the song to come might well be a form of wisdom on the verge of being lost as it was quickly being displaced by what he called knowledge and information. "Where," he asked, "is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where the knowledge we have lost in information" (97)? I have suggested that, today, Eliot's belief in the goodness of wisdom has to be severely qualified, as it was not perhaps wise enough. But it should not, I think, be dismissed as irrelevant either. If, in repeating the question, we are not allowed today to entertain great expectations, we may perhaps still believe that, given the impossibility of grand solutions, the next best thing might well be to cling to the hope that things can get better simply because, here and there, whenever readers like you and me experience the literary, anti-entropic forces may, with luck, stop them from getting worse.

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Oracle Night: A Bakhtinian Reading of Paul Auster's Metafictional Narrative

Sigrid Renaux

Centro Universitário Campos de Andrade

When one is dealing with current metafiction and is thus inside one of the characteristics of the postmodern novel, there is no way of ignoring Bakhtin's essay on the distinctiveness of the novel as opposed to the epic, and, specifically, his comments on the development of the novel as a genre:

The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process. The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it. In many respects the novel has anticipated, and continues to anticipate, the future development of literature as a whole. (*Dialogic 7*)

The relevance of these comments to the challenges that the postmodern novel as a still developing genre faces in our twenty-first century becomes even more evident as one realizes that, in spite of the contradictions inherent in the term "postmodernism" – as it simultaneously inscribes and subverts the artistic and theoretical conventions of a dominant culture – it is perhaps precisely the "strategic doubleness or political ambidextrousness," considered to be the common denominator of many

postmodernist discourses (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 612), that allows us to discuss Paul Auster's *Oracle Night* (2003) not only as a metafictional novel – or as “experimental fabulation” (Scholes 4) – but, simultaneously and consequently, as a postmodern Menippean Satire.

On the one hand, as a metafictional narrative, providing “within itself, a commentary on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception,” *Oracle Night* is a “manifestation of the postmodern” (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* xii-xiii), and, as such, concerned with its status as fiction, narrative and language. It is grounded on a verifiable historical reality, installing yet also subverting conventions; it employs traditional forms and expectations but at the same time undermines them; it challenges the fixing of boundaries between genres, while asserting itself as a novel (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 612).

On the other hand, due to these same concerns, *Oracle Night* simultaneously inserts itself back into what Bakhtin has called the seriocomic genres: specifically, into the Menippean satire, characterized by an extraordinary freedom of philosophical invention and of invention within the plot, which become justified by a purely philosophical end, the creation of extraordinary situations in which to provoke and test a philosophical idea – the *word* or the *truth*, embodied in the image of the seeker after this truth. All the other characteristics gravitate around this most important feature. Among them, the presentation of ultimate questions and threshold dialogs, scenes of crude underworld naturalism, moral-psychological experimentation, dreams or journeys to unknown lands, a wide use of inserted genres, its publicistic quality. Bakhtin simultaneously emphasizes not only “the organic unity of all of these seemingly very heterogeneous traits” but also “the profound internal integrity of this genre,” thereby providing us with the key to the understanding of how such apparently disparate elements – an inherent characteristic of the postmodern – can still be internally justified by the very conception of this genre, throughout the centuries: a “carnivalized genre, extraordinarily flexible and as versatile as Proteus, and capable of penetrating other genres,” which “has had enormous, but as yet underestimated significance for the development of European literatures” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 93-97) and thus to the development of the novel. For this reason, in our reading of *Oracle Night*, as we follow the hero in his adventures through the worlds of reality and of fiction – for

his life, for the brief period of twelve days, becomes inextricably intertwined with the novel he is writing – we will at the same time be dealing with its postmodern concerns and challenges through its Menippean characteristics.

The hero's first adventure: from reality into the realm of the Paper Palace

As the novel starts, Sydney Orr – the first person narrator – is recovering from a near-fatal illness, due to a fall in a subway station in New York. The fact that the long illness had turned him for some time “into an old man”, although he was only thirty-four, already signals that this hero is young enough to realize that, as he had “mysteriously failed to die” his only choice now was, as he says, “to live as though a future life were waiting for me” (1). On the other hand, he also realizes that, although he now gradually managed to extend his walks “into some of the more far-flung crevices of the neighborhood”, he still “drifted along like a spectator in someone else’s dream,” and that he “wasn’t equipped to play that game anymore,” as he was “damaged goods now” (2). This double perspective on life that his convalescence provided him with will furnish him with the necessary detachment to live through the strange “adventures” that lie ahead of him, “either on earth, in the nether regions or on Olympus” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 94); simultaneously, it will reveal to us, through his dialogical attitude to himself, how his story, intrinsically enmeshed with complementary narrative lines and plots, will finally lead him to discover truth, thereby placing him, as the hero of this novel, inside the Menippea’s most important characteristic: the creation of *extraordinary situations* in which to provoke and test *truth*.

Thus, on the morning of September 18, 1982 – marking the exact day of the first extraordinary situation he will find himself in – Orr leaves the apartment he shares with his wife in Brooklyn and heads south. Having walked for several blocks, he suddenly spots a new stationery store on the other side of the street, which, in spite of the pomposity of its name – the “Paper Palace” – “looked too small to contain much of interest” (3). Nevertheless, the symbolic/metaphoric implications of this name, with its oxymoronic combination of size and fragility, already suggest that by

crossing the street and entering the store, attracted as he is by the ballpoints, pencils and rulers in the window, he will be crossing the line between reality and an enchanted world. The word palace, with its symbolic associations with the Mystic Center, often hard to find in the labyrinth of this world, and appearing as if by magic (Vries 356), with secret chambers which hold treasures (Cirlot 249), foreshadows what Orr will find inside the store – spiritual guidance and illumination. The word paper, in its turn, as the material in the form of thin sheets used for writing, prefigures the blue notebook that Orr will buy and that will play such an important role in the story, while simultaneously, through its symbolic associations with transitoriness (Vries 357), it foreshadows the fact that this store will suddenly be moved by its owner to another place, as will be seen.

The sight of this Paper Palace will therefore reveal to Orr, in the first place, what he had been unconscious of – his wish to start writing again. As he muses,

If I decided to cross the street and go in, it must have been because I secretly wanted to start working again – without knowing it, without being aware of the urge that had been gathering inside me. I hadn't written anything since coming home from the hospital in May – not a sentence, not a word – and hadn't felt the slightest inclination to do so. Now, after four months of apathy and silence, I suddenly got it into my head to stock up on a fresh set of supplies: new pens and pencils, new notebook, new ink cartridges and erasers, new pads and folders, new everything. (3)

At the same time, as he enters the store, he realizes he is going into a foreign world – reminding us of how he felt at the beginning of his outings: having lived in New York all his life, but feeling “like a man who had lost his way in a foreign city” (2). This strange new world is characterized not just by the Chinese owner sitting behind the cash register, “writing down columns of figures with a black mechanical pencil” (3-4), or by the tinkling sound of the door when Orr pulls it open, announcing that a customer has arrived but at the same time suggesting he is crossing a threshold – from the outside world of reality into the fictional reality of the Paper Palace, this “Mystic Center” holding unknown treasures – the blue notebook, which will act as the catalyst for his writing activities; it is characterized

above all by the quietness inside. As Orr comments, “I was the first customer of the day, and the stillness was so pronounced that I could hear the scratching of the man’s pencil behind me” (4). This stillness or silence, an essential quality in many charms (Vries 424), as well as “un prélude d’ouverture à la révélation” and thus enveloping “les grands événements” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 205), enhances through its symbolism the importance of the act of writing as the only sound that can be heard inside the Palace, marking not only the official beginning of the story Orr is about to tell us – “I believe this was where it began” (4)– but also the introduction of one of the main themes of the novel: *Oracle Night* as a metafictional narrative. As Orr acknowledges,

Whenever I think about that morning now, the sound of that pencil is always the first thing that comes back to me. To the degree that the story I am about to tell makes any sense, I believe this was where it began – in the space of those few seconds, when the sound of that pencil was the only sound left in the world. (4)

As these comments reveal further, Paul Auster, by projecting his hero-novelist’s concerns about fiction, narrative and language, is engaging him in a metafictional dialogue with the reader – a dialogue that will be continually problematized throughout the novel, thus reminding us that we are dealing with fiction, not with reality. Moreover, Auster is also emphasizing, in Orr’s comment “whenever I think about that morning now,” that the actual time of telling the story – the narrator’s “now” – takes place much later than the actual events, thus also foregrounding the hero’s temporal detachment from his narrative. As Orr later qualifies this time lapse, while musing on his conversation with the Chinese owner – “Twenty years have elapsed since that morning, and a fair amount of what we said to each other has been lost. I search my memory for the missing dialogue, but I can come up with no more than a few isolated fragments, bits and pieces shorn from their original context” (8) – he is once more stressing the metalinguistic character of his comments, and the fragmentary nature of the whole account, so characteristic of the postmodern novel.

As Orr makes his way down the aisle to examine the material on the shelves, he is attracted to one shelf “given over to a number of high-quality imported items” and, among them, a stack of notebooks. Reminding

us of the symbolic associations of the palace, with its “hidden treasures,” these notebooks are “especially attractive” to Orr, making him intuit that he is going to buy one: “I knew I was going to buy one the moment I picked it up and held it in my hands.” Like a magic item, the moment he holds the notebook for the first time, Orr feels “something akin to physical pleasure, a rush of sudden, incomprehensible well-being” (5), as if he had received, through touching the notebook, some kind of secret knowledge which will, in its turn, release in him again his gift for writing, thereby foregrounding once more the extraordinary adventure he is experiencing.

This feeling is corroborated by the Chinese owner, as he stresses to Orr, in their conversation, that “Everybody make words ... Everybody write things down ... Everything in here important to life, and that make me happy give honor to my life.” This remark brings out another revelation to Orr, as he wonders “What kind of stationery store owner was this ... who expounded to his customers on the metaphysics of paper, who saw himself as serving an essential role in the myriad affairs of humanity?” (6): the truth that, by participating in the dissemination of supplies for writing books, he was not only helping to promote the very act of writing, thereby again prefiguring the writing of the book that Orr would soon start, but simultaneously performing his role in life, a role that Orr himself needed to perform again. Even if the Chinese’s speech had “something comical about it,” taking away its authoritative nature by giving it a “jolly relativity” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 102), the message revealed to Orr – “the metaphysics of paper” – will impregnate the whole narrative, as more and more stories will be spun from the blue notebook. Moreover, the fact that, due to Chang’s poor English, he does not understand the spelling of Orr’s name, which he interprets first as *or* and then as *oar*, makes Orr write out his name “in block letters on the inside front cover” (9) of the blue notebook, to avoid any further misunderstandings, which thus becomes another symbolic act of his preparation to start the writing of his novel.

Although the first part of the episode ends with Orr emerging from the store into the reality of “the raw September day” (8), the hero’s adventure into the strange realm of the Paper Palace will be further problematized in terms of reality/fiction as well as in terms of chronological/psychological time, as he returns to the place two days later – halfway through the novel – and finds an empty store, with a “store for

rent” sign on the window. As mentioned above, the sudden “disappearance” of the Paper Palace had already been foreshadowed in the symbolic associations of paper with transitoriness, in the same way that the Paper Palace had suddenly been spotted by Orr on that Saturday morning. As Orr muses,

Just forty-eight hours earlier, Chang’s business had been in full operation ... but now, to my absolute astonishment, everything was gone ... I was so puzzled, I just stood there for a while staring into the vacant room. ... For a moment or two, I wondered if I hadn’t imagined my visit to the Paper Palace on Saturday morning or if the time sequence hadn’t been scrambled in my head, meaning that I was remembering something that had happened much earlier – not two days ago, but two weeks or two months ago. (98-9).

The fact that Orr was again “feeling some of the old dizziness and discombobulation” (98), as he was moving down Court Street to return to the store, confirms once more the thin line separating reality and dream in his past and present adventures, placed again within a historical reality – a store on a street in New York, September 20, 1982 – but simultaneously made unreal, and with chronological time “scrambled up” in the hero’s mind, as he doubts his own reality. Besides, the dream-like situation Orr is again faced with simultaneously reveals to him, through his doubts, his non-coincidence with himself, so characteristic of the Menippea’s moral-psychological experimentation – the representation of man’s unusual, abnormal moral and psychic states, destroying his epic, tragic integrity – and which has taken such a preeminent place again, inside the characteristics of the hero in the modern and postmodern novel.

The hero’s second adventure: from the Paper Palace into the realm of fiction

The interrelatedness of reality and fiction will now take another turn, as Orr returns home. After reading the note that his wife Grace had left him, saying that she would be back soon, and going into his workroom to prepare himself to start writing, he realizes first of all that since his discharge from the hospital, “until that Saturday morning in September,”

he has not once sat down in his chair. He feels again “like someone who had come home from a long and difficult journey, an unfortunate traveler who had returned to claim his rightful place in the world,” thus reminding us not only of his journey from sickness to health but also of the impact which Chang’s words about man’s fulfilling a role in life have had on him.

As he settles down at his old desk, filled with joy and determined “to mark the occasion by writing something in the blue notebook,” he nevertheless suddenly becomes aware that, in spite of his desire to write, he “had no idea how to begin.” This realization, as a preamble to the ritual of writing as an initiation ceremony, projects again the metafictional roots of Auster’s narrative, as Orr reveals to us a writer’s dilemma: whether to write down “any sentence” or to bide one’s time until inspiration comes. As he lets his thoughts “wander in and out” of the little squares on the page, he is reminded of a conversation he had with the novelist John Trause – an old friend of Grace’s family – who had been “rereading some of the novelists he had admired when he was young” (10), and who suggests that Orr rewrite an anecdote from one of Dashiell Hammett’s books. As he says, “There’s a novel in this somewhere ... I’m too old to want to think about it myself, but a young punk like you could really fly with it, turn it into something good. It’s a terrific premise. All you need is a story to go with it” (11).

The metafictional character of the novel, commenting on its own status as fiction and as language, and also on its own processes of production and reception, as mentioned above, is thus further enhanced not just by Auster the novelist presenting to us a hero-novelist, Sidney Orr, who is trying to write a new novel; or by Orr revealing what takes place behind the scenes at a writer’s desk – the external ritual of putting a fresh ink cartridge in his fountain pen and opening the notebook, as well as the internal ritual of “biding his time” for inspiration to arrive; or by Orr’s recalling a conversation with another novelist – Trause – about novelists and books. It is also strongly enhanced by Trause’s advice, as a consequence of his rereading past novelists, to use an anecdote by another writer as a prototype to develop his own story. Here is the older writer revealing the secret source of inspiration to a younger one, showing how inspiration can come through the use of a source text (which Orr will then rework for his own purposes). Thus the whole episode is once again set within the

Menippea's placing the hero in extraordinary situations, this time in the realm of fiction, in order to discover the truth about inspiration.

This advice, in turn, leads Orr to present us with a summary of Hammett's "Flitcraft episode" from the *Maltese Falcon*, "about the man who walks away from his life and disappears," as well as his comments about this source text: "I agreed that it [the story] was a good premise – good because at one moment or another we have all wanted to be someone else" (12). A first touch of the Menippea's philosophical universalism is thereby added to the hero's adventures, as he muses on man's ultimate questions – "a person's ultimate, decisive words and actions" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 95) – a topic that will be further developed throughout Orr's two narratives: the "realistic" events of his own life and the fictional events in his novel.

Moreover, these metafictional remarks, which up to here have served as *prolegomena* to Orr's adventures in the realm of fiction, will now become intermingled with the actual process of writing his novel, as he simultaneously writes and comments on his writing, thus further enhancing and problematizing the metafictional status of his enterprise. The fact that the novel itself, which extends from page 13 to page 94, will be occasionally interrupted by episodes from his own life story once again projects the interrelatedness of fiction and reality.

The main plot of Orr's narrative centers around Nick Bowen, an editor who, like his Flitcraft prototype, after narrowly escaping death from a falling gargoyle on a West Village street, decides to start his life over again. Without letting his wife or anybody else know, he takes a plane to Kansas City and eventually ends up working for Ed Victory, a former taxi-driver, in an underground archive, with shelves crammed with thousands of telephone books. As Bowen inadvertently locks himself in and is unable to leave the shelter, since Ed Victory is dying in hospital, Orr's novel suddenly stops, with his hero "sitting alone in the darkness" of the shelter, with no perspective of ever leaving it.

As Orr subsequently muses on how to remove his hero from the shelter, aware as he is of not hearing his "voice" any longer, his remarks once again foreground his concerns about the act of writing itself and about his loss of inspiration:

Until then, writing in the blue notebook had given me nothing but pleasure, a soaring, manic sense of fulfillment. Words had rushed out of me as though I were taking dictation, transcribing sentences from a voice that spoke in the crystalline language of dreams, nightmares, and unfettered thought. On the morning of September 20, however, two days after the day in question [the day he bought the notebook and started writing], that voice suddenly went silent. I opened the notebook, and when I glanced down at the page in front of me, I realized that I was lost, that I didn't know what I was doing anymore. I had locked the door and turned out the light, and now I didn't have the faintest idea of how to get him out of there. Dozens of solutions sprang to mind, but they all seemed trite, mechanical, dull. (96-7)

These metafictional concerns will be projected again in the footnote that Orr adds, later on in the novel, about his dilemma as to how to “improve Bowen's condition somewhat without having to alter the central thrust of the narrative” (124), thus stressing the importance of keeping the driving force of the original episode: that of a man who walks away from life and disappears.

Orr's final comment on his unfinished narrative, that “Bowen would be trapped in the room forever, and I decided that the moment had finally come to abandon my efforts to rescue him” (187), only corroborates his feeling that “the notebook was a place of trouble for me, and whatever I tried to write in it would end in failure. Every story would stop in the middle; every project would carry me along just so far, and then I'd look up and discover that I was lost” (188). This realization that art without inspiration could lead him to a dead end, like his character Nick Bowen, that the blue notebook without “that voice” would not be enough to make a writer of him, even with a source text to guide him, thus becomes another insight of truth with which his adventure into the realm of fiction has provided him.

The fact that all the metafictional remarks and texts discussed above can simultaneously be placed within the Menippean inserted genres – intensifying the variety of styles and tones of a narrative, while also revealing the author's “new attitude to the word as the material of literature, an attitude characteristic of the dialogical line in the development of literary prose” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 97) – enhances once more the way in which Auster's narrative becomes a postmodern manifestation of this old genre.

The hero's return to reality

The problematization of the hero's reality through his adventures into the realms of the Paper Palace and of fiction now needs to be correlated with the other events that occurred to Orr between September 18 and October 1st, 1982 – and that are thus anchored to the verifiable historical reality of twentieth century New York City – as these events will lead him to discover a kind of truth different from the one revealed to him through art.

Thus, on that same day, September 18th, and following on after the events mentioned above, a new “extraordinary situation” lies in store for the hero, as Orr and Grace are invited to have dinner at Trause's apartment. As Orr explains, “John loved Grace, and Grace loved him back, and because I was the man in Grace's life, John had welcomed me into the inner circle of his affections” (25). Still a naïve interpreter of John and Grace's relationship, Orr's comment nevertheless presages the nature of their true relationship, as will be revealed further on. The fact that John has phlebitis, and looks haggard, older and in pain, upsets Grace enormously, and on their way home in a taxi she starts crying. Although Orr does not believe in her explanation – “It's just that he looked so terrible tonight . . . so done-in. All the men I love are falling apart” – for he suspects that “something else was troubling her, some private torment she wasn't willing to share” (43), he nevertheless manages to make her relax.

In their ensuing conversation, and in response to Orr's recollections of his adolescent commitment to the *Blue Team*, whose members represented “the dream of a perfect society,” Grace's argument that “people don't always act the same way. They're good one minute and bad the next. They make mistakes. Good people do bad things, Sid” will become prophetic again of her feelings about her renewed relationship with Trause, and will continue to reverberate in Orr's mind throughout the novel. Similarly, as Grace accuses Orr of still believing “in that junk”, his reply – “I don't believe in anything. Being alive – that's what I believe in. Being alive and being with you. That's all there is for me, Grace. There's nothing else, not a single thing in the whole goddamn world” (48) – not only prefigures his decision to forget the past events when Grace decides she wants to stay married to him, but simultaneously foregrounds his very stance in life, which will be foregrounded again at the end of the novel. The fact that they were crossing Brooklyn Bridge during their discussion, and thus

crossing “the link between what can be perceived and what is beyond perception,” for “the bridge is always symbolic of a transition from one state to another” (Cirlot 33), only enhances the portentousness of the discussion between Grace and Orr of their “*pro et contra* of the ultimate questions of life” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 95), and the significance of their “oracle night” for the development of the novel.

A new “extraordinary situation” lies in store for Orr, however. After discovering on Monday morning that Chang’s store has disappeared, Orr is then so shaken by a newspaper article he reads in coffee shop, about a baby born in a toilet and then discarded in a garbage bin, that he realizes he was “reading a story about the end of mankind, that that room in the Bronx was the precise spot on earth where human life had lost its meaning” (101). If Orr has already wandered through unknown fantasy lands, this episode now shows us the hero descending into the nether world, for the article is, like the story Ed Victory told Nick Bowen in the underground archive, “another dispatch from the bowels of hell” (100). It leads Orr to realize that real events turn out to be much more shocking than any kind of fiction, emphasizing the way in which the blow of truth he has received from reality through the newspaper article (in the guise of inserted genres) simultaneously foregrounds the novel’s publicistic quality, as it alludes “to the great and small events of the epoch” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 97), and also projects *Oracle Night* as an accusation against the loss of meaning to which human life has become subject in our postmodern world.

The impact of this episode will be projected again as Grace returns home and reveals to Orr that she is pregnant. She suggests having an abortion, as she is not sure whether she is pregnant by Orr or by John Trause, with whom she has resumed a past affair during Orr’s almost fatal illness, alleging that “this seems the worst possible moment” (114). However, Orr reinforces his reply that “married people don’t kill their babies. Not when they love each other” (115) by making her read, like “any shyster lawyer” defending himself, that “dreadful newspaper clipping.” This not only brings tears to Grace’s eyes, but makes him realize, months later, through her answer “It isn’t fair, Sidney. What does this... this nightmare have to do with us? ... What’s wrong with you? I’m only trying to hold our life together in the best way I can” (117), that it was actually his fear of losing her that was the reason for his battling to have a child together; it was about him, much more than about having a baby.

A string of further extraordinary situations leading to the hero's confrontation with truth continue to mark Orr's return to reality, from scenes of moral-psychological experimentation to scenes of crude underworld naturalism (Bakhtin, *Problems* 95-6). As he recalls them on his way home on September 27, having tossed his torn blue notebook into a garbage can, and with it "Flitcraft and Bowen, the rant about the dead baby in the Bronx, my soap opera version of Grace's love life" (196),

I blundered through those nine days in September 1982 like someone trapped inside a clod. I tried to write a story and came to an impasse. I tried to sell an idea for a film and was rejected. I lost my friend's manuscript. I nearly lost my wife, and yet fervently as I loved her, I didn't hesitate to drop my pants in a darkened sex club and thrust myself into the mouth of a stranger. I was a lost man, an ill man, a man struggling to regain his footing. (198)

Even so, he simultaneously realizes that

underneath all the missteps and follies I committed that week, I knew something I wasn't aware of knowing. At certain moments during those days, I felt as if my body had become transparent, a porous membrane through which all the invisible forces of the world could pass The future was already inside me, and I was preparing myself for the disasters that were about to come. (198-99)

The "horrors" Orr is about "to relate now" will alter yet again his relationship with Grace, with his stance as a writer and also with the way he faces reality. On that same night and still unaware of Trause's sudden death from pulmonary embolism, Orr and Grace receive an unexpected visit from Trause's son, Jacob, in need of cash. As Orr sees Jacob, looking like "some futuristic undertaker who'd come to carry away a dead body," and thus prefiguring what will happen to Grace's baby, Orr knows "the future was standing in front of me" (207). Their verbal confrontation erupts "into physical violence" as Grace attempts to call the police. Jacob slams her against the wall, punches her and kicks her in the belly with his boots, leaving her moaning and nearly unconscious while Orr, unable to deter him, is also knocked down. It is only after Orr threatens to kill him with a carving knife that Jacob leaves, to be killed later on by his fellow drug addicts. Despite losing the baby and being taken to hospital in critical condition, Grace nevertheless manages to survive.

As Orr thinks back on the events three days later – Trause’s burial, and the bequest he left Orr and Grace – he realizes, on his way to the hospital to see his wife, that he is “happier to be alive than I had ever been before. It was a happiness beyond consolation, beyond misery, beyond all the ugliness and beauty of the world” (216-17). His latest adventures in real life have led him to discover a deeper truth than the one he has learned from fiction: that fiction can remain unfinished, but life, in spite of its horror and violence, goes on, pointing to the infinite possibilities that lie ahead for him in his new relationship with Grace.

As a metafictional narrative, *Oracle Night*, commenting on its own status as fiction and also on its processes of production, while simultaneously inserting itself, through its plot, in the genre of the Menippean satire, thus becomes, through the intermingling of these concerns and characteristics, not only a manifestation of the postmodern novel, but also, through its reappropriation of an old genre, a postmodern Menippean satire. This “strategic doubleness” of looking forward and backward, of challenging conventions while asserting itself as a novel, in this way reasserts once more the relevance of Bakhtin’s prognostication of the importance of the novel as the only genre born of this new world and its ability to anticipate the future development of literature as a whole, iconic as it has become of our postmodern reality in the process of its unfolding.

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Diaspora and Modernity: The Postethnic Ethos in Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children*

Smaro Kamboureli
University of Guelph

Modernity and diaspora have different genealogies, but their ideological, social, and cultural trajectories often converge in significant ways. The social and economic progress that is fundamental to the project of modernity shares the same impetus behind the cross-national mobility characterizing diaspora. Whether they belong in, to use Arjun Appadurai's terms, "diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, [or] diasporas of despair" (6), diasporic subjects are impelled to move away from their communities and families by the desire—indeed the need—to improve their living conditions, and help ameliorate the conditions of those staying at home. But the dream of progress at the heart of diaspora does not necessarily emerge from the same philosophical and value systems informing modernity. Diasporic movements are inflected by their distinct geopolitical particularities. Nevertheless, because most diasporic movements see the West as their destination, and because the circumstances that necessitate migration may share a complex relationship with the West's colonial, political, and economic impact on the mother nation-states, the emancipatory agenda of modernity is often inscribed in the aspirations typifying diaspora. The Enlightenment's universal principles that determined the course of Western progress translated modernity into a project of, what we may call today, transnational aspirations and objectives. Since its inception, then, modernity has been synonymous with modernization at cross-national levels, a project that saw hegemonic practices and the export of political systems and technological advancements imbricated in each other. This is precisely

what Dorothy L. Hodgson has in mind when she states “the *project* of Modernity was also a *mission*” (3).

As Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar writes, modernity “has traveled from the West to the rest of the world not only in terms of cultural forms, social practices, and institutional arrangements, but also as a form of discourse that interrogates the present” (14). The mobility ingrained in modernity offers a rationalization of imperial expansionism and colonization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also reveals the structural similarities modernity shares with diaspora. Even though, normally, modernity operates as the antecedent of diaspora, diasporic mobility itself contributes to the modernization of nation-states that produce diasporas, and does so by generating modernities that are site-specific. Thus, while modernity is “born in and of the West” (Gaonkar 1), some of its premises are not exclusively specific to the West. If one of the characteristics of modernity includes “questioning the present” (Gaonkar 13), it would be foolhardy to assume that such a fundamental human trait is solely a Western phenomenon. Even non-Western nations that privilege tradition, as is the case today with some Islamic states, do so by following their own understanding of why the present needs to be changed. It would be reductive, as Barbara M. Cooper suggests,

to see Muslim subjectivities of the contemporary moment as being primarily or initially emanations of or reactions to the Western secular subject . . . We must ask ourselves whether there are modernities outside the reflexive/reactive ‘alternatives’ to the West, modernities that emerge out of global phenomena and postcolonial histories but that engage different kinds of understandings of wealth, personhood, and the public sphere than are commonly taken for granted in much work on modernity and globalization. (94)

Gaonkar’s dual model of modernity that distinguishes between “societal modernization and cultural modernity” (1) offers a corrective to the critical solipsism of absorbing all manifestations of modernity into its Western origins. Gaonkar’s cultural approach “holds that modernity always unfolds within a specific cultural or civilizational context and that different starting points for the transition to modernity lead to different outcomes . . . and produce alternate modernities at different national and

cultural sites. In short, modernity is not one, but many” (17). The interrelationship I am proposing here between modernity and diaspora promises to generate a more nuanced awareness of how these two concepts intersect and influence each other. This is important especially in light of the fact that most Canadian studies of the construction of diasporic subjectivities or the representation of ethnicity tend to overlook the ways in which diaspora and modernity are discursively related. By failing to take notice, on one hand, of the rigorous scrutiny modernity has undergone in the last half of the twentieth century, especially in view of its homogenizing impulses, and, on the other, of how modernity is inscribed in the reformation of the Canadian nation as a multicultural state, they remain complicit with some of modernity’s internal contradictions. They exemplify what Paul Gilroy calls “occidental modernity” (43), the desire to see diasporic subjects participate in the emancipatory transformations modernity entails without, however, paying heed to the appropriating and hegemonic implications of these processes. Reading, then, diaspora through modernity, and vice-versa, has the potential of revealing aspects of diasporic texts hitherto unnoticed, while at the same time raising fruitful methodological questions.

Despite the many productive debates in Canada about postcolonial and diasporic subjectivities, and many critics’ attempts to disaffiliate themselves from the liberalism—a manifestation of modernity—that informs such constructs as the policy of multiculturalism, there is a noticeable trend characterizing certain studies of diasporic literature.¹ This trend, akin to what Bruce Robbins calls “epistemological progress” (62), is manifested through the critical interest in exposing what Nancy Hartsock calls “the falseness of the view from the top,” and subsequently embracing “an account of the world as seen from the margins” (171). But such a method of reading narratives about diasporic experience, or accounts—fictional or not—of ethnicization and racialization does not necessarily promise to release our critical perspective from the effects of knowledges

¹ My point here concerns the discursiveness of this kind of critical discourse, hence my not providing examples of particular critics.

subjugated to the problematic ideologies of the Enlightenment legacy. If anything, it assumes, as Robbins argues, “a norm or *telos* of marginality in relation to which the abandonment of ‘the view from the top’ can and will appear as an improvement,” an instance of modernization. “This disguised progressiveness,” Robbins goes on to say, “lurks in every account that purports to come from the margins and in every imperative that enjoins us to speak (or measure our distance) from them.” The problem here is the assumption that “one day” this “‘view from the top’ can be recatalogued as a relic of the past, a casualty of some actual or potential version of progress” (Robbins 62).

It is precisely this process—no matter how well intentioned—of translating conditions of marginality into emancipated positions without scrutinizing what this emancipation involves that reveals the complicity characterizing certain critical acts. The critical trend I am talking about is inclined to employ a linear thinking akin to the same teleology that characterizes the narrative of modernization, thus setting out to recuperate otherness and rehabilitate the nation.² Its method, complicit as it is with the goals of the Enlightenment tradition, is reconciliatory. In that, it supports the emergence of liberalist discourses such as those of “the politics of recognition” proposed by Charles Taylor, or of what we might call the politics of disaffiliation advanced by Neil Bissoondath in *The Cult of Multiculturalism*, a text premised on the assumption that Canada has entered a stage of postethnicity.³ As Roy Miki says, Bissoondath “masquerades . . . as a supposedly beyond race and ethnicity perceiver” (127). The problem with postethnicity lies not in the diasporic subject’s desire to imagine a future in Canada free of racialization and discriminatory experiences, but in the assumption that this desire has materialized, thus implying that we inhabit a space and time already “beyond” race and ethnicity.

² I discuss the critical tendency to recuperate the nation at greater length in “Faking It: Fred Wah and the Postcolonial Imaginary.” *Études Canadiennes* 54 (2003): 115-32.

³ The argument for postethnicity, though certainly not similar to postcoloniality, raises questions similar to those addressed, for example, in *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature*, ed. Laura Moss (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2003).

Denise Chong's *The Concubine's Children* is a text that performs modernity as an ambivalent and troubling sign, especially in terms of its contingent relationship to diaspora. The ambivalence in this text is generated at once by the markers of modernity that constitute Chong's narrative and by the strategies she employs to represent herself as a Chinese Canadian whose "daunting" task of composing her family's history is largely intended to make her "feel that those who were in their graves were somehow behind me" (xi). Regardless of its geographic locality, modernity as a process that privileges the development of normative subjectivities by negotiating "the experience of otherness" (Anderson 269) is at the centre of Chong's text. Though we can see the experiences of her family's diasporic movements between China and Canada as emblematic of the migration patterns of many Chinese Americans and Chinese Canadians, Chong is unabashedly clear about not belonging to this diaspora. She writes *The Concubine's Children*, what she calls her "family project" (xi), because she wants to lay the specters of the past in peace, to put the hyphen signifying her ethnicity under erasure, so that she can occupy a normative subject position. Articulated in emancipatory terms, this act begs the double question of what such a normative subjectivity signifies and at what expense it is achieved. It is this paradox of creating a narrative about her family's ethnic origins and diasporic experience while simultaneously forestalling a consistent attempt at "self-regard" as an Asian Canadian that exemplifies the discursive relationship between modernity and diaspora in this text.

"Self-regard," a concept Freud introduces in his essay "On Narcissism," as Rey Chow explains in her study of ethnic autobiographies, entails displaying a healthy kind of "narcissism" that can assist the ethnic subject achieve "self-preservation" in light of the negative construction of its identity by "mainstream society." "Self-regard," then, according to Chow, "in the visual as well as social senses of the term, is the complicated result of the self's negotiations with the observing collective conscience" ("The Secrets" 64). Such negotiations, in Chong's narrative, are already *fait accompli*, hence promulgating a postethnic position. The lack of "self-regard" in *The Concubine's Children*, as I hope to show, is not only a result of the mediation Chong's self-representation undergoes through its

interpellation by dominant society; it is also a consequence of the way she treats the different kinds of modernity that inform her family's diasporic trajectory.

Written primarily for the white North American reader,⁴ *The Concubine's Children* is a generically hybrid text. A saga about Chong's family roots in China; a biography of her maternal grandmother, May-ying, the concubine of the title; a historiographic account or creative non-fiction narrated, mostly, in the third person; an autobiography since the narrative is framed by Chong's personal voice in the opening and concluding sections—these are some of the genres through which we could read *The Concubine's Children*. But focusing on the text's generic hybridity, however interesting it might be, or interpreting the character of May-ying, as Eleanor Ty does, through Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection (Ty 38-39), does not necessarily disclose the text's ideological complexity, let alone the ambivalences and complicity that mark its narrative. Ty calls the text "historiographic ethnography," and situates its generic hybridity in the postmodern tradition as defined by Linda Hutcheon: "Chong's novel [*sic*]. . . is closer to a 'postmodern' text, in Hutcheon's definition of the term, than it is a straightforward memoir or family history" (38), thus revealing the author's "awareness of the way truths are selectively produced and represented" (39).⁵ Drawing attention to the "authenticity," as well as to the manufactured truths, of the documents Chong relies on to tell her story (38), Ty is able to conclude that Chong's "authentic and reassuring encounter with her grandmother (and mother) is . . . what Denise Chong desires" (39). But her reading, privileging as it does some of the text's formal and generic elements at the expense of its ideological contradictions and

⁴ Chong does not distinguish between white and non-white, or Chinese and non-Chinese, readers, but the historical glosses she offers clearly indicate that she has a non-Chinese readership in mind.

⁵ See my critique of Hutcheon's notion of postmodernism and the way it influences her response to Canadian multiculturalism in *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 2000.

generic hybridity, aligns the text with Hutcheon's well-rehearsed postmodern reading of Canadian literature while overlooking the political implications of Hutcheon's notion of the postmodern.

Moreover, to make the text fit not only the postmodern tradition, but also that of diasporic writing, Ty attributes to Chong "a personal nostalgia" impelled by her "lament [for] the vanished past" (40). Similar to the trope of the return, nostalgia is a recurring motif in diasporic texts. But nostalgia is not to be confused with the desire, however complex, "to get a glimpse of the past" (Chong xiii). Nostalgia implies a longing for something or some place that a subject had a tight relationship, and continues to feel a strong affinity, with. As a manifestation of affect, contrary to Ty's interpretation, nostalgia is absent in Chong's self-representation. Her "collective remembering" (Ty 40) of her family's past allows her to "recuperate . . . her mother's and her grandmother's life stories" (Ty 52), but this "recuperation"—a term Ty employs more than once in her chapter on Chong—is inscribed by the same teleology and progressive thinking of modernity. The act of "recuperating" the past in order to put it "behind" demonstrates that Chong sets out not only to "recuperate" the Chinese "otherness" of her family, but also to rehabilitate the Canadian nation-state. The acculturation and social mobility of the second and third generations of this family in Canada may testify to their tenacity, but they also reflect how effectively certain tenets of modernity are part and parcel of Canadian national pedagogy. Nor does Chong, as Ty concludes, "contend . . . with her own sense of alterity, her divided subjectivity" (52-53). Rather than articulating a hybridized subjectivity, both Chong's narrativization of the past and her self-representation are permeated by the ethos of postethnicity.

In *The Concubine's Children*, postethnicity is constructed by the lack of "self-regard," on the one hand, and by Chong's rhetoric and tropes of self-dissimulation, on the other. Chong both identifies and disidentifies with the lives she records, a process reflected, in part, by the double point of view of her text's narrative. Now she appears in the text as the speaking "I," now she disappears behind the guise of what she calls "an omniscient narrator" (xi). In a similar fashion, at the same time that Chong acknowledges that, while living in Peking with her partner, she is "dogged" by the "feeling" that she "st[oo]d on the same soil" as her mother's Chinese

relatives, she leaves no doubt that “[i]t was not a sense of ‘Chineseness’ I was after; I had stopped trying to contrive any such feeling following Mother’s early advice—‘You’re a Canadian, not Chinese. Stop trying to feel something’” (262). Her mother’s admonition warns Chong against “feeling” nostalgia for a past she knows very little about, but also lays bare what the ethos of postethnicity entails. As David Hollinger, an advocate for postethnicity, writes:

the postethnic perspective pulls together and defends certain elements of multiculturalism and criticizes others. A postethnic perspective favors voluntary over involuntary affiliations, balances an appreciation for communities of descent with a determination to make room for new communities, and promotes solidarities of wide scope that incorporate people with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. A postethnic perspective resists the grounding of knowledge and moral values in blood and history, but works within the last generation’s recognition that many of the ideas and values once taken to be universal are specific to certain cultures. . . . A postethnic perspective builds upon a cosmopolitan element prominent within the multiculturalism movement and cuts against its equally prominent pluralist element. . . . Cosmopolitanism is more wary of traditional enclosures and favors voluntary affiliations. (3)

. . . Cosmopolitanism itself is . . . generic. It is an impulse toward worldly breadth associated especially with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century . . . But postethnicity is the critical renewal of cosmopolitanism in the context of today’s greater sensitivity to roots. “Rooted cosmopolitanism” is . . . a label . . . moving in the direction of what I call postethnic. (5)

Seen in the context of postethnicity, Chong’s narrative, far from being an attempt at asserting her alterity, reinforces her desire to “affiliate” herself with Canadianness, an affiliation tantamount to releasing her from the historical legacy of Chinese immigration in Canada. The generic hybridity of Chong’s text, then, rather than pointing, as Ty, for example, argues, toward the hybridity of Chong’s identity, underpins her desire to bracket history. Her declaration that she is “Canadian, not Chinese” is the result of the subtle interpellation process Chong has undergone through national pedagogy. Indeed, as the phrase “early advice” alludes to, it is her mother who mediates this interpellation process, clearly a case of the old adage that

the family is structured like the nation, and vice versa—a paradigmatic instance of how assimilation occurs.⁶

Even when Hing / Winnie encourages her eight-year-old daughter, Denise, to read a Chinese book, she gives her *Moment in Peking* (1939), a novel written by the Americanized Chinese author Lin Yutang (1895-1976). Yutang, who wrote most of his books in English since his main goal was to promote Chinese Culture in the West, casts his female characters as the embodiment of the spirit, as well as the horrendous difficulties, of China's modernization—modernization in terms of both importing Western values into China and modernizing China from within.⁷ But the travails and sad endings of the novel's female characters do little to endear China to young Denise. As Chong remembers, "All that seemed beyond the reach of reality. To me, China was what was left *behind* when the boat carrying my grandmother, pregnant with my mother, docked in Vancouver. . . . China was where you'd find yourself if you dug a hole deep enough to come out the other side of the Earth" (242; my emphasis). Clearly, the pedagogy Chong is exposed to, practiced at once in the public sphere and within the family, affirms the privileging of a progressive, teleological logic that the "China" Chong is familiar with fails to embody. According to this logic, the past of Chong's family has no bearing on her present, which, in turn, has no room for China: "China"—as the culture of the Chinese in the diaspora and as the country she visits with her mother—is framed by

⁶ In Muriel Kitagawa's *This Is My Own: Letters to Wes and Other Writings on Japanese Canadians, 1941-1948* (1985), it is Kitagawa who, as a mother, rather than the political activist and writer that she was, encourages her children to assimilate.

⁷ Educated in English in China, as well as in the U.S., France, and Germany, Yutang was a commercial writer who lived most of his life in the West, especially New York, and spent his last years in Taiwan and Hong Kong. As I am revising this essay, November 2005, *Moment in Peking*, in its 1977 translation by Taiwanese Zhang Zhenyu, is number two on the best seller list in China, right after *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, according to The Beijing News. The novel's portrayal of its three female central characters who kill themselves (though not by drowning in a well, as Chong says) sees traditional interpretation of Confucian, and patriarchal, values, as well as the advent of Maoism, as the main impediments to China's modernization.

the “behind” and “beyond” of Chong’s representational apparatus. Thus, she can “return” to “China” only “in the form of fetishism” (Chow, *Women* 27).

Chong’s assertion of her Canadianness is an antagonistic process, for it involves casting off her Chineseness—precisely what postethnicity calls for. It is also posited as an unambiguous manifestation of agency, of an identity constructed willfully by the subject herself. This process, Hollinger argues, implies an anti-essentialist understanding of the formation of subjectivity. Or, as Jonathan Rée would say, identity is no longer “the element of permanent continuity beneath apparent change” (85). Nevertheless, while the anti-essentialism of postethnic identity is directed against authenticity as is conventionally bound to ethnic origins, it embraces the simulacrum of coherence posited by Canadian national identity, a coherence akin to the ethos of modernity. Postethnicity is offered as proof of the subject’s emancipatory gesture of releasing herself from what is perceived to be the double yoke of race and ethnicity. This emancipation reflects, in part, the subject’s desire to compensate for the traumas suffered by Chinese Canadians as a result of the history of marginalization and discrimination. Thus, in Chong’s text postethnic identity emerges as an alternative to ontologically grounded essentialism, ethnicization, and hybridity. But there is an interesting paradox here: while the postethnic subject exercises a certain voluntarism in moving “beyond” her minority position, she takes on a national identity, Canadian, which is implicitly understood not as an identity encompassing difference but as one that has already domesticated otherness. This domestication of otherness, together with the elements of Orientalist discourse in the text—as Ty acknowledges, there is “an exotic and fascinating element” (43) in Chong’s narrativization of her family’s past—bolster the kind of modernity at work in *The Concubine’s Children*.

As Chong writes:

What Chinese pastimes we did *adopt* in our home were shaped by western sensibilities. We inherited from the handful of old-timers in Prince George used mah-jongg sets; they became blocks for building roadworks and whole cities for my brothers. I actually *pretended ignorance* of a connection with China when one of my airport chums came calling during another of *Po-po’s* visits. Seeing that my grandmother didn’t speak English and that she wasn’t white, and

forgetting that we Chongs were also different-looking, Diane asked where she came from. “My grandmother was born in Ladner,” I said, retrieving a conveniently remembered detail from my mother’s stories about a Canadian birth certificate that my grandmother had used to enter Canada. (247, my emphasis).

This passage shows that Chong’s parents expunged their Chinese heritage from their lives, so that Chinese culture was not an integral part of their children’s upbringing. There are many instances in diasporic Canadian literature that dramatize the disavowal of cultural origins, even of family members, the upshot of internalizing negative stereotypes about one’s diasporic roots, and the desire—more accurately, the need—to fit in.⁸ In this context, what is important in the passage above is that Chinese culture is simultaneously relinquished and documented. The ambivalence that emerges from this dialectic discloses the discursive relationship between modernity and diaspora.

Chong’s use of the verb “to adopt” in reference to her “Chinese pastimes” suggests a complex process of rejection, translation, and appropriation, a process analogous to how Orientalism operates. Adoption here implies that Chinese culture circulates within the Chong family as an imported object that has already undergone mediation. Orientalized by “western sensibilities,” Chinese culture is now a product that has recreational value, an instance of what Chow calls ethnography: “the use of things, characters and narratives not for themselves but for their collective, hallucinatory signification of ‘ethnicity’” (*Primitive Passions* 144). The mah-jong sets, used as if they were Lego blocks, are a concrete example of domesticated otherness, of the capaciousness of the Canadian nation-state to “adopt” foreign habits while neutralizing their cultural specificity. Chong does not, then, as Ty suggests, “represent[herself] as an ethnic . . . other” (35). Quite the contrary, this—and other similar scenes in the narrative, or statements like “The visits with *Po-po* served as a reminder that we were Chinese, yet her Chineseness could take us by surprise” (247), and “There were family gatherings in Vancouver, but our lives

⁸ See, for example, Frank Paci’s novel, *Black Madonna* (1982), and Neil Bissoondath’s first novel, *A Casual Brutality* (1988).

bypassed Chinatown. On rare occasions, we tried a new restaurant there” (258)—believe any claim that Chong thinks of herself “as a Chinese in the diaspora” (Ty 43). Instead, Chong installs in her narrative the paradigm of “native” and “other.” Aspects of her narrative that question this paradigm, as when Chong draws attention to the marginalization of the early Chinese immigrants in Vancouver, invariably concern “the debris of [her] mother’s past” (251). She thus simultaneously stresses the biological ties with the Chinese subjects of her “family project” and keeps her Chineseness at bay. The culture / nature paradigm inscribed in her postethnic position leaves ethnicity, as it is defined by official multiculturalism, unexamined. Thus, postethnicity posits an interesting, albeit vexing, contradiction: a neo-essentialist authenticity—the belated nativism of Canadian identity, the Canadian household as a comfort zone—constructed by a voluntarism that is produced both by the subject herself and by national and familial pedagogies. What makes Chong’s self-dissimulation feasible, then, is that it is anchored in modernity’s dream of progress, as well as its attendant notion of tradition as “modernity’s polar opposite” (Gilroy 188).

Postethnicity, in my interpretation of *The Concubine’s Children*, is not synonymous with a disavowal of history. Instead, it evacuates history of its continuity, and underlines modernity’s imperative to move, in the name of progress, “beyond,” and, consequently, leave “behind,” the tradition of China. Chong’s employment of history in *The Concubine’s Children* is certainly crucial to our understanding of the text’s characters and their experiences, but it is how she rehearses and contains this history that is relevant to my reading. We have to read her narrative in the large context of the mass migration movements at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were responsive at once to the labor hands needed as a result of developments in such nations as the United States, Canada, and Australia and to the dire conditions of poorer, “underdeveloped” countries such as those in southern Europe or China. Specifically, it was the Gold Rush and the construction of the railway in the American West that enticed the first large numbers of Chinese to immigrate to the United States.

Similarly, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, completed in 1885, was one of the most important projects through which Canada materialized its aspirations as a recently established confederation both in relation to its fears about American expansionism in the West and

its own dream of unity, a project which became possible largely through the cheap labor of approximately 7,000 Chinese laborers. Chong, understandably so, recites this history with particular emphasis to the region her grandfather came from, but she translates the socio-economic conditions that gave rise to this migration into a folk tale, albeit one marked by “anti-Chinese feelings” (13), “the Head Tax, and the Exclusion Act” (15): “There were men from the delta of the Pearl River in Kwangtung province, where seafarers were folk heroes. In the eighteenth century, Canton had been the only Chinese port open to foreigners. Ever since the arrival there of foreign traders offering to exchange opium from India for Chinese silk and tea, distant shores had meant adventure” (13). Surely there must have been the occasional Chinese man from Kuangtung who left seeking “adventure,”⁹ but the Orientalist allure inscribed in this retelling of diasporic history is certainly disproved by the many histories and narratives that document the immigration of Chinese men to North America. It was poverty and the need to fend for their families’ future, not a craving for adventure, which compelled these early immigrants to come to North America.

Chong’s maternal great-grandfather emigrated to San Francisco before the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 in the US. Like many other Chinese immigrants, he moved back and forth, “three times in all” (14), until the last time he was back, 1888, when “Congress suddenly declared void all Certificates of Return” (15) and thus put an end to “his sojourn abroad” (14). The movement back and forth, which also marks the life of Chan Sam, Chong’s grandfather and one of the central figures in her narrative, is typical of the trope of the return that characterizes diaspora. Conventionally, the trope of the return signifies nostalgia, but this seesaw pattern of the diasporic experience of Chinese male immigrants is also consonant with the discursiveness aligning diaspora and modernity, more precisely, with diaspora as a particular configuration of modernity. The tension

⁹ Kuangtung, where Canton is, and Shanghai were two places in China that, during the period Chan Sam moved back and forth between China and Canada, saw most of the changes, positive as well as negative, as a result of Chinese modernity and the political movements that advocated different aspects of it. See Alitto, and Leo Oufan Lee, “Shanghai Modern: Reflections on Urban Culture in China in the 1930s,” in Gaonkar (86-122).

implicit in the pendulum swing between East and West is paradigmatic not only of some aspects of the expansionism of Western modernity, but also, as Guy S. Alitto argues, in *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, of the “conservative” character of Chinese “modernization”: “Chinese learning for fundamental principles; Western learning for practical application” (6). Though Chan Sam’s life exemplifies this particular aspect of Chinese modernity, Chong’s rendering of his character dispenses with it. Instead, her representation of Chan Sam is influenced by her overwhelming desire to leave Chinese culture “behind” because of the “primitiveness” she attributes to it—“primitiveness” in Chow’s definition of the term, as the result of a “belated fascination” with a culture and with “its datedness and alterity” (*Primitive Passions* 145). The only scene in the book that appears twice—once in the first chapter, and later in the second-last chapter—illustrates the fetishizing character of Chong’s representational strategies.

The scene concerns Chong’s first visit to Chang Gar Bin, her grandfather’s village in Guangdong, and more specifically the guestroom where she and her mother are put up. In the first account of this visit, Chong describes the room as “a storeroom . . . h[olding] an inventory of junk: a tall, rusted metal crib with broken springs, . . . an RCA Victor phonograph” (2). When the scene is repeated, the euphemism she employs to describe the room—“room of honor”—and the additional details she offers further emphasize her Chinese relatives’ backwardness. “[T]here was little privacy,” she records. “We had to contend with the pig pacing the adjoining kitchen and passageway . . . [m]osquitoes oblivious to the . . . repellent tablet smoldering atop a kerosene lamp on the cement floor, . . . dogs howl[ing] next door, where the neighbor slaughtered the choice of the day for his restaurant” (276). The events that Chong narrates in-between the two versions of this scene—the stories she has discovered in the interim about her family’s past—have no apparent impact on her perceptions of her Chinese surroundings. If anything, she is all the more determined to leave China “behind.” There is, however, one interesting shift: the crib and the phonograph her grandfather had brought over from Canada, signs of Western progress, and which are described in the beginning of the book as “junk,” are now referred to as “relics from Gold Mountain” (282). “Relic” and “junk” are not synonyms. While “relic” implies a

connection to the past—an artifact, a keepsake, an object that, though of no use today, is valued because it has survived the past—“junk” is associated with debris, with second-hand objects, things that may be useless or have little, if any, value. From a Western perspective, a rusty crib is junk, but from the point of view of Chong’s Chinese relatives this junk not only has a different value and function, but has also accrued a complex and contradictory set of meanings over the years associated with Chan Sam in the diaspora.

On his two visits back from Gold Mountain to his home village, Chan Sam arrives with enough money and Canadian tools to begin building the biggest and most ostentatious house in Chang Gar Bin. He ships over to China a variety of Western goods, ranging from three large mirrors and big clocks to the Western treats his Canadian-born daughters, who accompany him, along with May-ying, their mother and Chang Sam’s concubine, are fond of. Chan Sam’s attachment to certain Western goods is not a sign that he has become completely westernized. Rather, he embodies the ambivalences and contradictions characterizing Chinese modernity at the time. While he resumes his work as farmer, thus participating in the agrarian life of rural China, Chan Sam also introduces notions of industrialized modernity, creating much-needed work opportunities for the village’s farmers in the wintertime. He does not reject the old filiative order sustained by traditional life in China. Instead, he employs Western technology as a tool that mediates his desire to both uphold traditional values and keep apace with the modernization of China.¹⁰ It is precisely this—his practicing a modernity that is not intended to snub traditional Chinese values, in many ways the epitome of Chinese modernity—that prompts the villagers to “congratulate each other that” their community “could boast one husband and father who had kept his head above water” (77). “Not only would his house be the first built by a peasant of their generation . . . but it would bring Chang Gar Bin renown among the surrounding villages” (78). The house never gets finished, and Chan Sam’s Chinese family barely makes it through the years of political turbulence

¹⁰ Chan Sam’s character deserves a much more detailed reading in relation to Chinese modernity and diaspora, as does, too, the character of May-ying, but a longer treatment of these characters is beyond the scope of a single essay.

that follow. Nevertheless, given the cultural economy of the community, Western technology is appropriated and valued from a traditional Chinese perspective. So when Chan Sam's daughters are seen playing with "their overseas toys," they are called "*Faan-gwei-neu*," meaning "foreign girl." This foreignness, though, is not necessarily seen as a contaminating influence but as a "compliment" (86).

In China, the sign of the foreign must be seen in both discursive and historical terms, for it shifts meaning and value depending on who imports it, to whom it is attached, and at what historical moment it is appraised. As Alitto writes, when "cultural units were confronted with modernization, they conceived of it as 'foreign,' and thus productive of that tension between 'history' and 'value'" (10). For Chan Sam, the foreign has a positive value. It is what his masculine identity co-opts in order to live up to the patriarchal imperatives of his culture and fulfill his family responsibilities. This same sign, however, is translated into a vile and contaminating influence by Mao's troops when they arrive in the village. Similarly, the foreign comes to signify exclusion and alienation when it is associated with female identity. Thus, to the villagers in Chang Gar Bin and her two daughters living there, May-ying is known as the "foreign woman," an appellation not meant as a compliment in this instance. Yet Chong's narrativization of her Chinese relatives' experiences, though it discloses these historical and gender shifts, insists on seeing the foreign as a stable sign. This is the reason the fruits of the diasporic experience of Chong's grandparents survive in *The Concubine's Children* as a sign of ambivalence at best, cultural impotence at worst. Diaspora, seen in Chang Gar Bin as an enabling experience, a site from which a "pragmatic" (Alitto 123) notion of modernization emanates, functions in Chong's narrative as a sign of the failure to embrace progress. Chong's translation of the foreign as junk, then, employs what Lisa Chow would call a "realist aesthetic" (107), an aesthetic that demonstrates Chong's fetishization of the Western concept of modernity and modernity in China. This points as much to her desire to disassociate herself from Chinese culture as to the ways in which the materiality of history in her text is measured in strictly material terms. If her grandfather emerges from her narrative as a failure—indeed, as a pathetic figure—it is because the trajectory of his life is measured against history understood as a continuous narrative of progress.

This is one of the reasons why Chong's visit to China and interest in the past do not exemplify the nostalgia we have come to expect from certain kinds of ethnic writing but are, instead, marked by the kind of self-contained anxiety associated with postethnicity.

The progressivist impulse of Western modernity as a master narrative that produces the need in diasporic subjects to assimilate, and thus enter a postethnic stage, is apparent in the following passage:

Mother grew up within the walls of rooming houses, smoke-filled mah-jong parlors and dank alleyways. My siblings and I had country lanes to ride our bicycles on . . . She was punished if she played too much; we were allowed to play to our hearts' content. We had to clear just one early hurdle—neighbors not used to "Orientals" on the block. Taunts chased us to school: "Chinky, Chinky Chinaman, sitting on a fence, making a dollar out of fifteen cents." At recess, children threw stone-laden snowballs in our direction; after school they waited in ambush to knock us off our bicycles. Mother's advice to feign deafness worked, and she and Father made it clear to other parents that they wouldn't put up with abuse. Acceptance and friendship soon followed, and *we ourselves soon forgot that we were any different from our white playmates.* (240, my emphasis)

The racist taunting that she and her siblings experience may have stopped "soon," but "soon" here discloses Chong's ability to "forget" that she is a racialized subject. Her forgetting is yet another effect of the pedagogy I discussed above—once more, a pedagogy practiced by her mother. Resistance to racism can take different forms, including silence, depending on the discursive conditions surrounding it, but, in the context of this text, the advice of Chong's mother to "feign deafness" reflects assimilation-as-submission to the Canadian national imaginary. This is what makes it possible for Chong to employ here a rhetoric of conversion, namely, a rhetoric that declares the end of racism, which she calls euphemistically "just one early hurdle." The representation of racism as an isolated episode; the parental advice to adopt a strategy of deafness; and the quick elimination of the problem—all this serves to uphold whiteness as the normative identity. Chong's "forg[etting]" that she is no "different from" her "white playmates" discloses, in a performative fashion, why her Chineseness is edited out of the sentence. Her attempt, then, to register racism as a

temporary lapse in the dominant white society advocates political quiescence. In *The Concubine's Children*, to borrow Ann Laura Stoler's words, "racism appears at once as a return to the past as it harnesses itself to progressive projects" (90).

As Zygmunt Bauman says, in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, "There are friends and enemies. And there are strangers" (143). Friends and enemies are symmetrically related; strangers represent an awesome threat (145). It is the "friends' narrative domination" (143) that resolves the antagonism between them and their "enemies." In the passage above, Chong perceives herself as an "enemy" who becomes a "friend." What rescues her from the painful realization that she is indeed seen as a "stranger" by her white playmates is the upward mobility that characterizes her mother's experience. It is class, the mother's escape from Chinatown's "dank alleyways," that promises to fulfill Chong's seemingly autonomous desire to put "behind" her, to defer confronting, her self-racialization as the same-as-white. According to Gilroy, modernity is "fragmented along axes constituted by racial conflict and [can] accommodate non-synchronous, heterocultural modes of social life in close proximity." If we examine modernity in relation to diaspora, as Gilroy does in *The Black Atlantic*, then we also see it "punctuated by the processes of acculturation and terror" (197) that come along with most diasporic movements of racialized subjects. The simultaneous existence of emancipatory and containment gestures in modernity points to the extent to which nostalgia for a coherent self is always marked by "unstable and asymmetrical" (Gilroy 198) relations. Many theorists of modernity, from Jurgen Habermas to Fredric Jameson, from Gilroy to Chow, have stressed the complex relations of modernity to time-consciousness. What Jameson calls "deep memory" (154) and Gilroy "a mnemonic function" draws attention to the recurring impulse of modernity, that is, the predilection to make things cohere by directing "the consciousness of [a] group back to significant, nodal points in its common history and social memory" (Gilroy 198). But this function of recollection also entails forgetfulness. This dialectic of forgetting and remembering is precisely what characterizes Chong's narrative. The ideological ambivalences in *The Concubine's Children* are not necessarily the same as the political and cultural incompatibilities diasporic subjects must come to terms with. For Chong, the dialectic of memory and forgetting, one of the tropes of

postethnicity produces Canada as a comfort zone, a site where modernity has already appropriated diaspora.

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afflict – both the research and teaching in the fields of language and literature in our own present time? What are some of the strategies that researchers and educators have been employing to deal with these issues?" This concern led the scholars involved and, above all, the editors of this volume to consider the role of interdisciplinarity in the improvement of research and teaching, beginning with the connections between language and literature. In short, the possibilities raised by interdisciplinarity were not only useful as a way of responding to the questions raised but also as a means of introducing new challenges and approaches for future studies.

Carlos Daghljan

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