

this means that they are “raw” corpora, without any grammatical mark-up attached to the lexical items. The presence of both forms of the word, anyway, is a good indication for us to consider “union(s)” as a very salient word in the British corpus. Something similar happens in the keyword list of the American corpus for the words “euro” and “euros,” but whereas the word “union” is probably representative of the British Alitalia corpus as such, for the reason explained above, “euro” may be considered to be more generally characteristic of American discourse about Europe (in the American reference corpus, money is obviously referred to in USD).

Perhaps of greater interest is that the Italian keyword list does not contain any economic terms, unless we consider *trattativa* (“negotiation”) *piano* (“plan”), *accordo* (“agreement”), *offerta* (“offer”), and *cordata* (“consortium”), but these are all words that are not specific to economics, and are actually used with the same meaning in many other Italian contexts. Table 5 shows the economic terms that appear in the keyword lists in English: although the British corpus is the only Alitalia corpus that contains articles from a financial newspaper (*Financial Times*) it is in the American corpus that economic keywords are more numerous.

Table 5 Economic terms in British and American keyword lists

<b>British corpus</b>	<b>American corpus</b>
Investors	investors
Bankruptcy	assets
Stake	euros
Takeover	administrator
	euro
	bankrupt
	billion
	bankruptcy

Elsewhere (Fusari 37-83), I went into much detail about the characteristics of these keyword lists, and I provided a meticulous analysis of the keyword “*piloti/ pilots*,” which is among the most frequent in all three corpora, and particularly revealing of the representation of Alitalia’s workforce and unions by the selected newspapers.

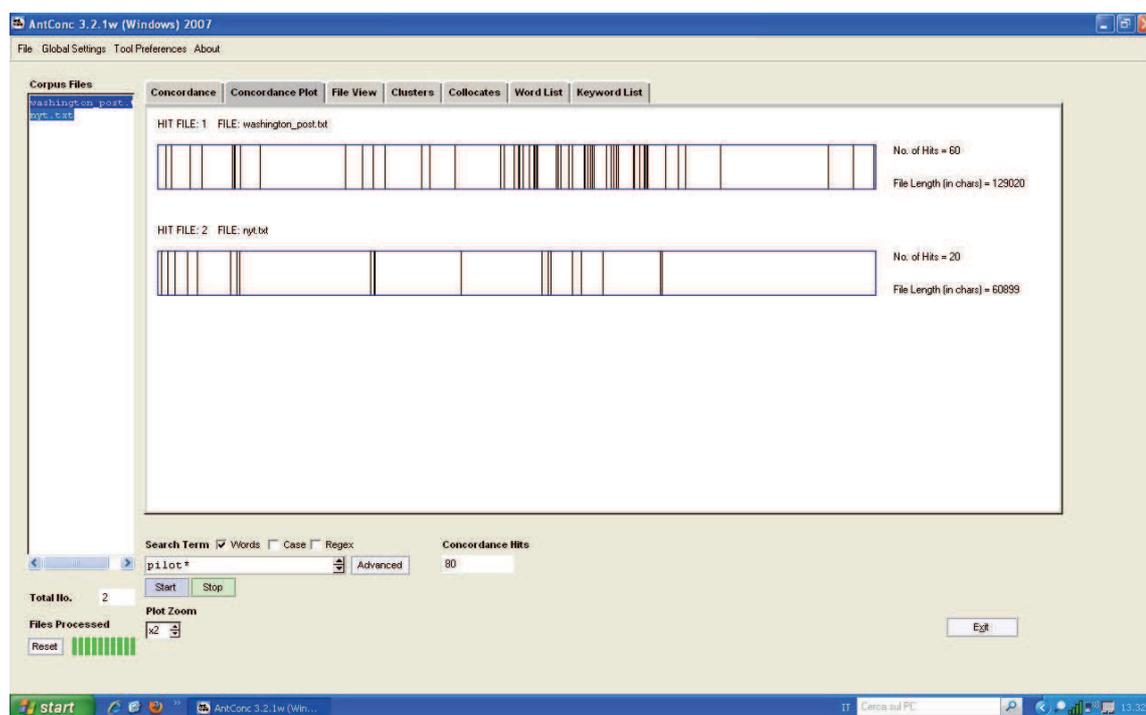
In the American corpus, the frequency of the word “pilots” is very similar to the corresponding figure in the Italian and British corpus (2.6 per thousand words). What is significantly different from the other two corpora is the relative frequency with which the two American newspapers use this word: the concordance plot<sup>3</sup> in figure 1 shows that the *Washington Post* discusses pilots three times as often as the *New York Times*. The diagram also shows that this word is most frequently mentioned in mid-November 2008, that is the time when Alitalia started sending out the letters in which its circa 20,000 employees were informed that they were being laid off. An identical frequency peak is identifiable in the Italian corpus, whereas in the British corpus, pilots are more frequently mentioned in articles published in September 2008, when the left-wing union confederation CGIL signed the privatization agreement with the CAI consortium. This

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<sup>3</sup> Concordance plots (also known as “dispersion plots”) make it possible to identify at which point(s), or in which text(s), in a given corpus, the occurrences of a given lexical item tend to cluster together. This shows if and where any frequency peaks of a given word, or multi-word expression, may be observed in the corpus or corpora being analyzed.

event was considered to be particularly newsworthy by the British press due to CGIL's initial reluctance to sign.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the British corpus, the American one lends more importance to the beginning of the mass layoff process, and is therefore more similar to the Italian corpus in this respect.

Figure 1 Concordance plot of “pilot\*”, American corpus



Concordance 1 illustrates a selection of the occurrences of the word “pilots” in the American corpus: the lines taken from the *Washington Post* are separated from the ones taken from the *New York Times* to allow for comparison between the two newspapers.

Concordance 1 Examples taken from the concordance of ‘pilots’, American corpus (5 hits per newspaper)

#### Washington Post

1... The once-reluctant **pilots'** unions agreed to the rescue plan in the early hours of Saturday, leaving just flight attendants who will have further talks on Monday...

2... Facing the prospect of liquidating a symbol of national pride, sacking its 19,000 workers and seeing its slots go to foreign airlines, Berlusconi pinned the blame for the airline's predicament squarely on the **pilots** and flight attendants...

3...Three of the four larger union confederations have said they would accept the deal, but smaller ones, including those representing

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of the run-up to Alitalia's bankruptcy and corporate restructuring, see Fusari 23-33.

**pilots** and flight attendants, continue to object to the number of layoffs and pay cuts foreseen in the new labor contracts...

4... Some unions have agreed to the deal. But unions for **pilots** and flight attendants are unhappy about criteria for who gets laid off and for part-time workers...

5... Renegade Alitalia **pilots** and flight attendants are in their fifth day of strikes to protest a deal to privatize the state-run airline and relaunch it as a leaner, more efficient carrier...

#### **New York Times**

6...While an accord with the **pilots'** union would be a significant step toward getting CAI back at the table, other sticking points remained...

7... Some reports put the reductions as high as 40 percent depending on how fringe benefits, like a service picking up **pilots** from home before a flight, are calculated...

8...The person said that the **pilots'** union, along representatives of the cabin crews, seemed prepared Sunday to make concessions...

9... “The **pilots** are looking more flexible on working practices, and in return they have been given a guarantee that they will be given the status of managers in the new contract, which they didn't have before”, the person said...

10... A person with direct knowledge of the negotiations, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that having the **pilots'** agreement was critical to CAI's ability to carry out its plan...

The most striking difference between the American corpus and the other two corpora is perhaps the high percentage of cases (40%) in which the pilots' plight is associated to that of other Alitalia employees. In other words, unlike the Italian and British corpora, which tend to see pilots, and especially pilots' unions, as defending their own interests (often described as *privilegi* in Italian), not necessarily in conjunction with those of other Alitalia employees, the American corpus consistently represents pilots and their unions as the hardest liners among a variety of labor unions and organizations trying to bargain to keep jobs and obtain new contracts with favorable working conditions for the airline generally.

The word “privileges,” referring to the “working practices” (line 9, Concordance 1) and “fringe benefits”<sup>5</sup> (line 7) enjoyed by pilots and other flight staff, is used only once in the American corpus, within a quotation attributed to “a person close to the discussions, who spoke only on condition of anonymity.” “Alitalia unions, particularly the flight crews and the cabin crews, are basically not showing flexibility on the contract—they don't want to give up the privileges that set them out from the rest of the industry in Europe,” the person said.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In the British corpus, the same concept is identified by the words “perks” and “working practices.”

<sup>6</sup> *Rescue of Italian Airline Stumbles over Labor Talks*, in *New York Times*, September 12, 2008, written by Caroline Brothers.

In the American corpus, sources are quite often<sup>7</sup> identified not by their name or through their institutional or professional status (e.g. pilot, politician, union representative etc.), but as being well-informed people who do not want the journalists to reveal their identity. This shows that the American newspapers represented in this study, especially the *New York Times*, are more likely to lend credibility to informants that decline to give their names: a close analysis of the behavior of phraseologies that contain the word “anonymous” and “anonymity” makes it possible to conclude that these informants are most probably “deep throats” disclosing insider information on the privatization deal. This appears clearly in the *Washington Post*, which quotes information provided by “a CAI spokesman, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not permitted to speak on the record to the media.” This higher emphasis on gathering and reporting first-hand information, regardless of the personal situation, emotions, name and role of informants, is confirmed by the fact that the American corpus displays the largest number of *verba dicendi* across the Alitalia corpora: the most widespread is obviously “to say,” whose different forms total 11.9 per thousand words, as against 9.3 per thousand in the British corpus, and just about 2 per thousand for the various forms of the verbs *dire* and *affermare* in the Italian corpus.

The American newspapers’ attempt to convey a high degree of objectivity in their treatment of Alitalia’s story is confirmed by the fact that the corpus does not contain any opinion piece or editorial, unlike the other two corpora, where comment is given much space, especially in the *Corriere della Sera* and *Financial Times*. This does not mean, however, that the articles contained in the American corpus convey only facts, without opinion (this would be a blatantly naïve view of media discourse): what this situation reveals is that, in the American corpus, opinion is preferably expressed not directly by the journalists’ comment, but through their sources. Proof of this is that, although the American corpus is the least prone to use creative metaphors and figurative language in its reports on Alitalia’s crisis (Fusari 126), it is the only one where multiple metaphors are found in extensive, literal quotations from sources, usually authoritative ones, represented as being “in the know” as concerns the privatization process. An example taken from the same article quoted above (footnote 6) reads,

“It’s been a slow, lingering death,” Mr. Wheeldon [senior strategist at BCG Partners, a London brokerage firm] added. “The Pearly Gates have opened and shut and it has failed to fly through in the past. This time, Alitalia should be allowed to slip into its coffin.”

This quotation allows the *New York Times* to frame Alitalia’s bankruptcy in exactly the same metaphorical terms that the other two corpora utilize (Alitalia’s mismanagement as a fatal illness that the Italian government has failed to treat for many years), but the use of inverted commas allows the journalist to let her informant speak, thus lending greater credibility and objectivity to the narrative being told and to the evaluation being provided by her financially knowledgeable source.

To summarize, our comparative analysis of the Alitalia corpora allows us to conclude that the American corpus has the strongest tendency to frame Alitalia’s privatization as a purely economic issue, with many more business and finance terms among the most frequent keywords. All the corpora give much relevance to the role of labor unions in this privatization process, but the American corpus tends to represent them as more

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<sup>7</sup> 33 times in the *New York Times*, 2 in the *Washington Post*, 2 in the British corpus (both in the *Financial Times*), and none in the Italian corpus.

united in their struggle to keep jobs and obtain new contracts with favorable working conditions. Finally, the American newspapers represented in the corpus are the least inclined to provide editorial comments on this news event; comment, sometimes characterized by the use of creative metaphors, is typically embedded in quotations from the journalists’ sources, who are quite often described as “speaking on condition of anonymity.” All this contributes to giving readers the impression of a “facts first” approach, although it is evidently not devoid of criticism towards what has been widely seen, not only in Italy, but internationally, as a problematic privatization process, characterized by drastic corporate downsizing and alleged violation of market principles.

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SERENA FUSCO

“COWARDICE IS WHAT YOU MAKE OF IT”: THREAT AND COLLABORATIVE  
HAPPINESS IN CHANG-RAE LEE’S *NATIVE SPEAKER*

*Introduction*

Chang-rae Lee’s award-winning *Native Speaker* (1995) is a fundamentally political novel, revolving around the construction of a community and the problematics related to this construction. Nevertheless, it is also profoundly intimate and emotional. *Native Speaker* deals with privacy both in the issues it tackles—love, estrangement, family, death, loss—and through the usage of a highly lyrical and subjective prose. In this paper, I argue that *Native Speaker* discloses private spaces turning them into a problematic ground for community building and public discourse. *Native Speaker* portrays a multilayered and articulated community, one that is formed of several components but that aspires to come together in unity despite being fragmented, and whose longing for happiness and security is steeped in profound anxiety. Collective and intersubjective solidarity are shadowed by their potential disruption, because of the always impending possibility of duplicity and betrayal. Anxiety and a sense of threat are, crucially, predicated on blurring the distinction between insiders and outsiders of the community itself—a distinction that is dramatically reinstated, yet melancholically questioned at the end of the novel, in almost elegiac tones.

A communal “we” is under discussion in Lee’s novel, and the novel tackles the question of how “we” can accommodate a “bleeding I,” each individual subject who carries her or his own story of personal trauma and suffering. In this sense, *Native Speaker* speaks to an increasingly multicultural public sphere—the US in the early-to-mid 1990s—that attempts to accommodate new elements, languages, and opportunities, new individual stories to be told, stories of disparate Asian immigrants and Asian Americans among the rest. In Lee’s novel, the public sphere attempts to re-imagine and enlarge itself in democratic terms, maybe even re-discuss its own terms of democracy. At the same time, the public sphere derives a profound anxiety from this attempted enlargement, and this anxiety forecloses the possibility of a smooth and shared democratic progress, problematically postponing it to an almost utopian future.

*The Core that Needs to Be Shared: Threat vs. Collaborative Happiness, or the Impossible Totality of Intimacy*

*Native Speaker* centers on and is told by Henry Park, a second-generation Korean American in his early thirties. Henry works for a small private intelligence company based in New York City that collects and delivers information on targeted individuals on behalf of a broad scope of possible clients: “[O]ur clients were multinational

corporations, bureaus of foreign governments, individuals of resource and connection. We provided them with information about people working against their vested interests ... In a phrase, we were spies” (17).<sup>1</sup> Henry’s company works according to a structure of ethnic coverage: “[e]ach of us engaged our own kind, more or less. Foreign workers, immigrants, first-generationals, neo-Americans. ... [Dennis Hoagland, the head of the firm,] said he knew a growth industry when he saw one” (18). Henry is appointed to collect information on Councilman John Kwang, a Korean American rising star on the New York political scene and probable mayoral candidate. On a more personal level, Henry faces the estrangement of his (white American) wife, Lelia, who cannot make sense of his apparently cold acceptance of the tragic accidental death of their seven-year-old son, Mitt. Henry eventually reconciles with Lelia and increasingly bonds with Kwang. The Councilman is ruined when Henry’s investigation reveals that Kwang is raising funds by means of a *ggeh* (an interethnic money club of Korean origin and conception that periodically redistributes funds to its participants) that is mostly financed by illegal immigrants. Following this revelation, high numbers of “aliens” are tracked down by the INS.

While *Native Speaker* addresses contemporary Asian American identity and especially the motif of the growing visibility, and simultaneous paradoxical invisibility, of Asians in the US,<sup>2</sup> the novel is also imbued with a broad reflection on collectivity and individuality: in my view, this relates the structure of ethnic coverage I have previously mentioned to broader forms of collective identity (beyond ethnicity) as well as to an individual, personal dimension. Henry’s company deals in *people*, in *individuals*—the only subject really “worth researching” (165). Glimmer & Co.’s system of ethnic coverage works much less by faking empathy than by really *obtaining* it, establishing it between the targeted subject and the spy and exploiting it. Henry describes his work as “personal” (6) and emotionally charged: “I was always assigned to an individual ... who in a matter of weeks could be as bound up with me as a brother or sister or wife” (6).

This intimacy entails risks, though, and Henry’s work of ethnic coverage and human bonding is revealed to be predicated on a double-edged anxiety. In order to carry out their assignments, Henry and his colleagues must “conspire,” work out intricate plans and conceal them from their assigned subjects, but these conspiracies, like love stories, are by definition hard to predict in their development and cost:

We worked by contriving intricate and open-ended emotional conspiracies. We became acquaintances, casual friends. Sometimes lovers. We were social drinkers. Embracers of children. Doubles partners. We threw rice at weddings, we laid wreaths at funerals. (18)

Anxiety, paranoia, insecurity, and a sense of diffused surveillance characterize the novel’s scenario. Henry’s company works to collect information that can be used to ensure the safety and security of a number of public and private entities. *Native Speaker* comments on a multi-local diffusion of threats and the need to assess those threats on part of a number of competing (collective and individual) subjects. As noted by J. Paul Narkunas, in terms of protecting their “vested interests,” national and multinational

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<sup>1</sup> C. Lee 18. The novel was originally published in 1995; I shall refer to the 1996 Riverhead paperback edition. References to this edition will from now on be included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> See Chen, Huang, and Palumbo-Liu. One of the paradigms of this in/visibility is the construction of Asian Americans as “the model minority”—discussed, among others, by Palumbo-Liu.

companies increasingly appear in the 1990s to be not so different from nation-states. Transnational flows, “the fluid motion of capital” and its “political force” (17), have increasingly unpredictable implications for nation-states as well as other communities, and people like Henry must act accordingly: “[w]e went wherever there was a need. The urgency of that need ... was determined by some calculus of power and money” (17). Henry’s job capitalizes on anxiety and on a conception of the public sphere as a risky area:

The intrigue. Always the intrigue. A certain sequence of unrelated events. Then bang. ... Hoagland necessarily considered everyone a world-political creature, with a *heightened persona*, a neurotic cultural manner.

... The UFO-Pentagon conspiracists. Amelia Earhart gurus. ...

This is the worry, alive and well everywhere. (19, my emphasis)

Scenarios of anxiety also comprise interethnic tension, with specific reference to episodes of violence between Koreans and African Americans.<sup>3</sup> Christian Moraru, Liam Corley, and Rachel Lee have remarked the reference made in the novel to the 1993 shipwreck of the *Golden Venture*, transporting illegal Chinese immigrants. This incident, Corley writes, “contributed to fears among the American populace of an ‘Asian invasion’ facilitated by unscrupulous smugglers and international networks of organized criminal syndicates” (Corley 62). Anxiety is also experienced by the “neo-Americans” Henry and his colleagues spy on, but their anxiety is of a different kind. If one reverses the anti-immigrant paranoid perspective described above, *Native Speaker* suggests that recent lower-class immigrants have a huge share of anxiety determined by the fact that they have no political representative. When a string of murders targets immigrant cab drivers, potential victims are “concerned and scared but there’s nobody who can speak for the drivers as a group” (246).

Corley has also observed the importance of Lee weaving together public and private spheres: in the private realm “historical truths [are revealed] that exceed the normative categories of public culture” (Corley 75). One instance of Lee dramatizing intimacy in the middle of events of public resonance is the understated yet heart-wrenching rendition of the incommensurable loss experienced by Henry and Lelia: Mitt’s death. Unable to fully make sense of this loss, Lelia reads it in racial terms: “[m]aybe it’s that Mitt wasn’t all white or all yellow. ... Maybe the world wasn’t ready for him” (129).<sup>4</sup> The space of emotional privacy—the space of interiority that is hidden from view, but that one simultaneously craves to *share* with someone else—is located at the end of a spectrum that has, at its other end, a collective dimension, almost messianic in its potentially global thrust, epitomized in the charismatic public figure of John Kwang. The need to address and overcome collective anxiety is articulated through a language of collective, disproportionate, desired yet impossible, to a certain extent even inappropriate *intimacy*. This language of impossible intimacy positions a private core at the heart of politics, turning it into the ground of a collective project but also a field of potential political conflict:

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<sup>3</sup> In this respect, the novel reminds readers of the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

<sup>4</sup> In its shedding light on a family tragedy as part of broader historical and political events, *Native Speaker* is partly remindful of Philip Roth’s *American Pastoral*, published two years later. On Lee’s novel and historical trauma, see Song.

Can you really make a family of thousands? One that will last? I knew he [Kwang] never sought to be an ethnic politician. He didn't want them to vote for him solely because he was colored or Asian. ... *So you make them into a part of you*. You remember everyone of their names. ... You are their hope. And all this because you are such a natural American, first thing and last, if something other in between. (326, my emphasis)

While Kwang's public status necessarily entails visibility, it is Henry's talent at making himself inconspicuous when required that makes him a talented spy: "I am hardly seen" (7); "you must be both convincing and unremarkable" (172). Tina Chen has analyzed Henry's "disappearing acts" as a specific case of Asian (American) in/visibility in the US: "[t]he qualities that make Henry a good spy are the result of his successful racialization: his history as 'the obedient, soft-spoken son' within his family and the invisible Asian Other in American society prepare him to move unseen when he wishes" (Chen 159). Both Chen and Christian Moraru have emphasized how Henry *performs* his Asian American identity according to what is expected of him. I would like to develop this in a slightly different direction and suggest that Henry's public persona—the result of a "double consciousness" that Chen ascribes to his being Asian American—becomes a problematic yet necessary space of personal investment. Both Henry's success in his job and the related risks revolve around a dosage of intimacy—intimacy that, in turn, is to be displayed against a cultural backdrop, a bigger picture. Individual exposure and self-investment must be renegotiated from time to time, finding a place in greater narratives, historical and cultural: "I know the greater truths reside in our necessary fictions spanning human event and time ... to be a true spy of identity ... you must be a spy of the culture" (206). Henry's in/visibility allows and, I contend, *urges* him to expose himself cautiously, "taking half-steps out" (127). "Overassess[ing] risk" (17) paradoxically implies identifying a problematic percentage of personal involvement as a necessary tool for action: "[o]ur office motto: *cowardice is what you make of it*" (17). Private spheres of life and intimacy can and indeed should be used, tactfully dosed: "I suppose you could call ours [his and Kwang's] a kind of romance" (139); "the instant shared feeling almost enough to make them intimates" (325). Henry risks revealing too much of himself, like in the case of the assignment of a Filipino psychiatrist, Emile Luzan: "I was looping ... through the core, freely talking about my life ... Hoagland, not hearing from me, sent in Jack Kalantzakos to retrieve my remains, my exposed bones" (22-23).<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Kwang assignment, this intimate negotiation of risk ultimately reveals implications that are too broad to fathom. Somehow clumsily, Henry almost discards accountability for the tragic outcome of his investigation, while claiming that what he has (unwittingly?) extracted from Kwang has marked him for life: "what I had seen in him I had not thought to seek, but will search out now for the long remainder of my days" (141).

I would suggest that the anxiety and sense of threat articulated in *Native Speaker* are germane to both a heightened perception of the changed role of the US in the global context after the end of the Cold War, in the middle of new waves of immigration, location of new enemies, and an increasing and hard-to-manage sense of

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<sup>5</sup> In his reports on Kwang, the "unauthorized autobiographies" (18) he sends his boss Hoagland, Henry further exposes himself when his *writing* becomes entangled with subjectivity: "[t]he teller, I know, can keep his face in the shadow only so long. We want him to come out, step into the light, bare himself. This is the shape of our era" (204). On the metafictional quality of Lee's novel see Rhee and Chen (especially 154-59).

“oneworldedness,”<sup>6</sup> and to an increasing preoccupation for the most significant and intimate core of each individual as something to be courted, won, and *secured* in a double sense: made secure and protected from threats, and conquered to broader narratives of collective identity. In his study of the increasing popularity of discourses of paranoia and conspiracy in American culture since after WWII, Timothy Melley argues that paranoid narratives address a crisis of representation, and especially a crisis in the perception of human agency. According to Melley, conspiracy narratives ultimately reinforce a sense of transcendent and self-reliant human agency “despite its inability to account for social regulation” (Melley 14), i.e., its inability to explain the reality of power unbalance and social inequality. This suggest, perhaps, that addressing “the worry” that is “everywhere” makes sense especially if one simultaneously asks: to what extent should the intimate vulnerability and the calculation of risk entailed in human agency be investigated in order to shed light on power unbalance and social regulations? In Henry’s case, closeness itself determines, or at least favors forms of exploitation that could easily have him as the next victim: “[m]y ugly immigrant’s truth ... is that I have *exploited my own*, and those others who can be exploited ... We are your most perilous and dutiful brethren, the song of our hearts at once furious and sad” (319-20, my emphasis).

*Conclusion: Displaced Intimacy as Political Project*

In her reading of the novel, to a good extent inspired by David Leiwei Li’s landmark study (1998) on how consent is developed as a strategy of containment in Asian American literature and culture, Betsy Huang observes that “while Lee’s John Kwang ... speaks the language of consent beautifully, his eventual failure ... suggests that consent may be, in reality, a set of limitations cloaked in the rhetoric of possibilities” (Huang 247). Kwang’s rise and fall, his failure, are eminently *public*: not so much a failed attempt at being American while continuing to be Korean as, in my view, an inability—or impossibility—to rework (ethnic) identity as flexible public sign. Within the limited rhetorical possibilities of identity formation in the public sphere, Kwang’s Asian Americanness is both similar to and different from Henry’s—two incarnations facing each other across the problematic, paradoxical temporal structure according to which democracy is a promise to be realized: “[h]e knew I was Korean, or Korean American, though perhaps not exactly the same way he was. We were of different stripes ... I didn’t know exactly what he saw in me. Maybe a someone we Koreans were *becoming*, the latest brand of an American. That I was *from the future*” (138-39, my emphasis). The charged “intimacy” between Henry and Kwang is predicated on an ever-changing dosage of difference-in-identity, and in that changing dosage lies the promise of a better future for the collectivity—a promise that is indefinitely deferred. The fact that Kwang’s downfall is precipitated by Henry—who, in Kwang’s eyes, embodies a future step in the kaleidoscope of American postnational identities – is deeply ironic. The future turns back upon the present with a vengeance, disrupting its promises, and the unequal configuration of the American public sphere—in both its local and transnational implications—as well as the borders between “insiders” and “outsiders,” are reinstated: democracy is projected onto an indeterminate moment in time, made quasi-utopian. In David Palumbo-Liu’s words, “that moment is not yet ripe” (Palumbo-

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<sup>6</sup> The term is borrowed from Apter.

Liu 317). *Native Speaker*'s rich canvas of political and emotional identification and disidentification is accompanied by a time warp that displaces Kwang's collective project, turning it elegiac in the bittersweet end of the novel, when Kwang has disappeared and Lelia and Henry work together as speech therapists, teaching nonnative children how to articulate the basic sounds of English: Lelia "calls out each one [of the children's names] as best as she can ... speaking a dozen lovely and native languages, calling all the difficult names of who we are" (349).

Can the elegiac "bleeding I" in the "we" be, after all, the basis of a political project for the construction of future citizens? If, on the one hand, the "we" is made out of "difficult names", on the other hand "[e]verybody, [Lelia] says, has been a good citizen" (349): "she thinks it's better to give them some laughs ... She wants them to know that there is nothing to fear, she wants to offer up a pale white woman horsing with the language to show them it's fine to mess it all up" (349). In *Native Speaker*, the construction of future citizenship is shown in its inevitable contradictions, and the Asian American "romance" of proximity and betrayal between Henry and Kwang becomes the figure of a vexed pursuit for happiness, and the quest for turning this pursuit into a right for everyone in the public sphere.

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GINEVRA GERACI

A MAP OF THE NEW WORLD. UNSYSTEMATIC CHARTS AND TRAVELLING  
ATLASES IN PAULE MARSHALL'S AND TONI MORRISON'S CARIBBEAN

In his seminal *Routes*, James Clifford points out a crucial difference between male and female experiences of diaspora, explaining that if one chooses to consider the diasporic dimension as one of dislocation and movement rather than settlement and rearticulation, men's perspective tend to prevail. This might also lead to consider specific stories and communities in terms of "generalized postmodern globalism" and "abstract nomadologies" (303-304). Yet, by focussing on particular stories of dislocation and displacement, the ambivalence of diaspora and the specificities of women's experiences emerge.

As a matter of fact, the portrayal of the Caribbean space in Paule Marshall's *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* highlights their affinities, and differences, as women writing themselves into a female tradition of existential adaptation and cultural rearrangement. What they share helps outline an open paradigm or rather a network of insular, fragmented, disjointed and, apparently, Edenic cultures that are observed by a female viewpoint. Both Morrison and Marshall subvert the pristine environment in which the trope of the Caribbean island is traditionally set: in their texts Eden becomes tainted, ambiguous, discomfoting. The traditional opposition between nature and culture, Sarmiento's notorious *civilización y barbarie*, exotic savage beauty on the one hand and Western (pseudo)rationality on the other becomes less sharply outlined.

Along with Clifford's argument about the specificity of women's diasporic experiences, the trope of the island and the exoticist metaphor can be assumed as a starting point to explore the nature of a fluid and decentred subject emerging from the ebb and flow of the Transatlantic passages that have crossed the history of the Caribbean and of black diaspora. In particular, by focussing on what Clifford defines as a female side of diaspora's story, when he emphasizes relocation and adjustment as opposed to "nomadism" and "postnational globalism," the trope of the Caribbean island can be explored as a distinct unit of meaning in the context of that relocation process.

*Tar Baby* is Morrison's only novel set in the Caribbean, while Marshall's West Indian ancestry plays an important part in all of her writing; yet in both, regardless of biographic differences, the trope of the island goes beyond purely geographical contingencies. It is hard not to read these two texts against the classical Shakespearean, calibanesque reference of *The Tempest*, especially if one looks at Caliban through the eyes of those Caribbean intellectuals—such as Aimé Césaire, Edward Braithwaite and Roberto Fernández Retamar—who made him the proud symbol of the other America (Retamar 14-16). Not only does the Caribbean, Calibanesque setting illuminate "the perspective of disenfranchised minorities" (Bhabha 8), it also provides the tools to

sweep a wider horizon. In fact, Édouard Glissant has developed “the archipelagic perspective,” namely unsystematic, inductive thought, as an epistemological approach to understand not just the Caribbean context but, more extensively, the processes shaping our postmodern, deterritorialized, postnational world (36).

The island is metonymically related to colonies all over the world. Its neatly limited geography suggests colonial repartition policies of the past as well as the contractual definition of controlled productive space and means that transnational capital needs in the present. This is especially evident in Marshall’s description of Bourneville as a plantation system in which a North American corporation exploits the small island and the poor population, so that a decaying factory turns into the gloomy hold of a (slave)ship:

The first time Saul entered the factory ... he was reminded of the deep hold of a ship. There was the noise, for one—the loud unrelieved drumming and pounding of the machines that powered the rollers which crushed the juice from the canes, and the shrill, almost human wail of the rollers themselves as they turned in their deep pit ... the men working there appeared almost disembodied forms: ghosts they might have been from some long sea voyage taken centuries ago. (154)

The neo-colonial “plantation” system operates not only through the organization of physical space, but also, and perhaps more significantly, by structuring the social and symbolic space. Despite his good intention, Saul Amron is a social scientist paid by a big corporation to study, analyze and reorganize supposedly compliant Bourne Island society according to a development program that is just another form of Western domination (Cosser 35). Black people on the island may look worn out, often passive and painfully unable to articulate their demands, yet they are not totally defeated and Marshall celebrates their resistance to old and new forms of oppression, a defiance that becomes evident in the re-enactment of Cuffee Ned’s slave riot (Denniston 102-105). Saul eventually realizes that he would rather train social scientists from overseas to work in their own countries because “Outsiders just complicates the picture” (Marshall 467). Morrison also develops this issue, although more obliquely, through the metaphor of undefeatable nature taking over as Valerian Street, despite still being “the centre of everything” (279), becomes weaker and weaker: “Things grew or died where and how they pleased. Isles des Chevaliers filled in the spaces that had been the island’s to begin with” (242).

In *Tar Baby*, the fictional Isle des Chevalier—the island that “had struck slaves blind the moment they saw it” (8)—is ravaged by Western acquisition frenzy in the form of “a collection of magnificent winter houses” (9) the building of which has implied the permanent alteration of the island’s morphology: “The men had already folded the earth where there had been no fold and hollowed where had been no hollow” (9). Valerian’s house perfectly symbolizes the incongruity of neo-colonial claims, as it includes a greenhouse causing one of his black servants to say: “If he wants hydrangeas he should go back home. He hauls everybody down to the equator to grow Northern flowers?” (13). Valerian, who bears the name of a Roman emperor, is the perfect embodiment of the self-righteous ruler oblivious of the wider context in which his fortune has been growing, as it becomes evident in Son’s judgement after he finds out that two servants have been dismissed for being caught while stealing apples:

He had been able to dismiss with a flutter of the fingers the people whose sugar and cocoa had allowed him to grow old in regal comfort; although he had taken the sugar and cocoa and paid for it as though it had no value, as though the cutting of cane and picking of beans was child’s play, and sold it to

other children and made a fortune in order to move near, but not in the midst of, the jungle where the sugar came from and build a palace with more of their labor and then hire them to do more of the work he was not capable of and paid them according to some scale of value that would outrage Satan himself and when these people wanted a little more of what he wanted, some apples for *their* Christmas, and took some, he dismissed them with a flutter of the fingers. (203)

Not only does this passage provide a short history of colonial and postcolonial exploitation, by mentioning apples and Satan it also evokes a Caribbean Paradise Lost from which the underdogs are expelled by a wrathful master. In this reverse Eden both Morrison and Marshall are conjuring that innocence is not a virtue, as Valerian realizes when he finds out that his wife had physically abused their son when he was a little child: “And all he could say was that he did not know. He was guilty, therefore, of innocence. Was there anything so loathsome as a wilfully innocent man? Hardly. An innocent man is a sin before God. Inhuman and therefore unworthy. No man should live without absorbing the sins of his kind” (243).

The colonialist imagination elaborated a notion of the Caribbean as a space where Europe’s lost innocence and beauty could be restored again and a hybrid, multi-ethnic Mediterranean re-enacted. As Michael Dash argues: “Through the Mediterranean as inter-textual matrix, a number of powerful tropes enter Caribbean writing: the field of play, the city as a polyglot Athens, the Babel of the Caribbean Sea, the magic of the twilight, and the futility of the flight into nature” (106). In this context, the closing Hellenic reference at the end of Derek Walcott’s “Map of the New World” comes as a deeply evocative touch: “The drizzle tightens like the strings of a harp. / A man with clouded eyes picks up the rain / and plucks the first line of the *Odyssey*” (413).

Yet, European history has revealed the contradiction between the frailty of heteroglossia and diversity, on the one hand, and the repeated violent efforts to eradicate deviant heterogeneity from an imagined smooth cultural landscape, on the other. Therefore, the New World imagination cannot be totally naive and the Caribbean cannot really be Eden. In fact, far from being a perfected Mediterranean regained in the New World, the Caribbean has been contaminated by the violence of history from the very beginning.

The Edenic image becomes tainted by physical labour so hard that it almost endangers one’s human nature. There is a passage in *The Chosen Place* where this becomes especially evident to the reader and to Saul Amron, who experiences a sort of nausea while he witnesses the harshness of brute toil: “At times he felt like a voyeur looking on from the immunity of his peephole at another’s debasement” (160). While Marshall portrays the work of Blacks in the cane industry as a new form of slavery, Morrison characterizes Valerian’s house as a slave system where nature—whether in the form of plants in a greenhouse or untamed young black men like Son—is to be domesticated. Trying to force Jadine away from all that, Son mulls over: “He saw it all as a rescue: first tearing her mind away from that binding awe. Then the physical escape from the plantation” (219).

The colonization process goes along with the colonizer’s imagination transfiguring the Caribbean as a place of lavishing beauty and sexual freedom, a symbolic domain where specific elements of Clifford’s reasoning on the female side of diasporic stories prove useful. Gender is a crucial factor that further complicates the archipelagic perspective and exacerbates the status of otherness already decreed by colour and economic status. Merle Kimbona is especially aware of how sexual exploitation is just another facet of oppression in the form of white people crowding a ghastly night club

where local girls entertain “wealthy expatriates, the tourists and the military” (Marshall 87). While Clifford wonders whether diaspora strengthens or rather challenges gender subordination (304), Marshall provides a sharp representation of white male sexual exploitation on Bournehills women.

This aspect calls into immediate question the idyllic representation of the Caribbean evoked from the beginning of the colonization process as closely connected with the feminine attractiveness of the place, the fertility of the land symbolically embodied in the lushness of the female body. In his analysis of the Caribbean as a European metaphorical construction, Dash stresses that from the very beginning the Tropics were invented as “a blank slate onto which an entire exoticist project could be inscribed. The repercussions of intensive industrialization in Europe and the colonization’s backlash of global cultural homogeneity created the need to see in the Tropics an antidote to Europe sense of loss” (17).

As in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, the island is the symbol of Western fantasies, the place where primary oppositions take place: not just male versus female, but also nature versus civilization as well as chaotic, endless proliferation versus pattern definition and systemic mapping typical of colonization processes. Black women evidently suffer the consequences of both racial and gender discrimination, yet diaspora as an anti-essentialist approach and a liberating attitude of the fluid self can also break the bonds of women’s double marginalization. Both Marshall’s and Morrison’s islands are a haven for outcasts and fugitives, a crossroads for intricate destinies, whether these belong to the anarchic, wandering undocumented men evoked in *Tar Baby* (166), to the literally wandering Jew Saul Amron or to the restless, spiritually disjointed Merle Kimbona in *The Chosen Place*.

These permanently travelling exiles are the perfect representation of Glissant’s “poétique du divers,” according to which new cultural identities stem from erratic forms of experience and knowledge that can only be understood in terms of an “aesthetic of relations” (12-27). Accordingly, the key characters in both *Tar Baby* and *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People* travel to one or the other extreme of the Transatlantic triangular route dating back to the slave trade and linking together America, Europe and Africa. The Caribbean proves to be an unsystematic cultural matrix unceasingly generating productive unbalances that propel the characters’ destinies and shape a literature of deliberately undertaken displacement (Dash 8-12). Displacement becomes a strategy that subtly overturns the working of the island-colony as full-fledged mechanism of oppression based on organized production and hierarchized social and racial relations. Similarly, in both *Tar Baby* and *The Chosen Place* the pecking order of black/white domains is threatened by chaos taking the shape of Bourneville carnival and Son’s disruptive presence in Valerian Street’s house.

In *Bridging the Americas* Stelamaris Coser intervenes in the dialogue on Pan-Africanism in the diaspora, examining the “inter-American” characteristics of Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Gayl Jones. In particular, *Tar Baby* and *The Chosen Place*, *The Timeless People* deal with overlapping issues of race, class, and nationality. Coser discusses this issue as part of the deliberate construction of a new identity for the New World and also describes the emergence of the “extended Caribbean,” according to Immanuel Wallerstein’s definition. The Caribbean is studied in relation with America and Africa and in the context of the “inter-American bridges” built by authors such as Morrison and Marshall. The Caribbean thus becomes “the crossroads of the world” (3-7).

While the Caribbean proves to be a place where shattered Mediterranean heteroglossia is impossible to be merely recreated, and European lost innocence simply regained, it also defines itself in opposition to that failed dream. The Caribbean should not be seen as a tropical Mediterranean as it “is not an inland, centralizing body of water but one that explodes outward, thereby dissolving all systems of centering or totalizing thought” (Dash 14). As Glissant points out, the Mediterranean is a sea that concentrates and has historically orientated men towards the idea of oneness, while the Caribbean Sea is an open sea that causes diffraction and dispersion. It encourages the emotion of diversity, the unpredictability of passages, encounters and destinies, all those unsystematic experiences that creolization will encompass (13).

However, the poetics of relating stemming from creolization does not annihilate the necessity of placeness. Glissant stresses that words are not pronounced in a vacuum, yet the place where those words resonate can be either walled in or completely open; similarly, the poetics of relating should allow walls to fall without diluting the idea of homeland (25). In this context, the metaphor of the crossroads becomes deeply evocative with its being at the same time a close-knit, even intricate knot of paths that, however, stretch forth in different directions: a perfect representation of creolization as a historical, existential and cultural experience. The Caribbean is the home from which one shall depart, a place where a culture of never ending travelling and discovering, both inward and outward, is continuously reworked. This endless transformation makes any once-for-all-established pattern useless, like a map that becomes outdated as soon as it is complete.

As a matter of fact, in Morrison’s novel, while pursuing Jadine back to Isle des Chevalier and Valerian’s house, Son is left on the less hospitable part of the island where it is hard for him “to land and even harder to get to the house” (305), where fog and darkness blur everything. His steps become steadier at last, but there is no indication of where he is really going, whether he is tracing his way back to Valerian’s house or eventually joining the legendary/imaginary descendants of African slaves living in the impenetrable woods on the island’s hills.

Conversely, Merle Kimbona finally comes to terms with her suffering and decides to go back to Africa, although following an unusual route that challenges the centrality of the West not only as a physical place but more importantly as a system of values: “she was going south to Trinidad, then to Recife in Brazil, and from Recife, that city where the great arm of the hemisphere reaches out toward the massive shoulder of Africa as though yearning to be joined to it as it had surely been in the beginning, she would fly across to Dakar and, from there, begin the long cross-continent journey to Kampala” (471). Yet, like *The Chosen Place, Tar Baby* ends on a less certain route, with the first rain of the season sweeping away the road and with one the character laughing and saying: “we can look for the old road to take a walk any day now” (472).

In conclusion, the Caribbean is assumed as a deeply symbolic dimension where a painful past has left deep scars, but these also become the tracks leading to an unforeseeable future; thus both novels end on slippery, uncertain roads swept away by the rain or hidden by the fog. As Derek Walcott writes in his “Map of the New World”:

At the end of this sentence, rain will begin.  
At the rain’s edge, a sail.

Slowly the sail will lose sight of islands;  
into a mist will go the belief in harbours  
of an entire race. (413)

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SERENA GUARRACINO

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR REPRESENTATION:  
CARIBBEAN AND US PERFORMANCES OF DIFFERENCE  
IN CARYL PHILLIPS' *DANCING IN THE DARK*

This paper explores the negotiation between identity politics and cultural difference and their role in a system of representative democracy, where “representative” is meant both in terms of political delegation and cultural visibility. My intention here is to counterpoint the competing spaces of the US and the Caribbean through the historical figure of Bert Williams, the Bahamian actor and singer who at the beginning of the twentieth century became the first black Broadway star. In his story, as told by Caryl Phillips in his novel *Dancing in the Dark* (2006), the Harlem of those years becomes both a utopian and a dystopian space, a place where black artists can become visible, but only at the price of bending under what Kobena Mercer has notoriously named “the burden of representation.” In this context, performance becomes a space where to represent, that is, to enact blackness in the arts and the media; it also entails to represent politically, to stand for or speak for a community.

Against the uniformity enforced by a democratic system where a representative is supposed to be standing for a community which in its turn is considered homogeneous, the novel highlights Williams’ multiple “differences”—as a black performer in the US, but also as a Caribbean working in a blossoming African American milieu, and finally as a comedian whose aesthetics was to become more and more problematic as a progressive narrative of black emancipation in the US took shape. Williams’ story is placed here at the centre of a complex network of cultural connections including Caribbean, white American and African American performative traditions; the inability of the American space—theatrical as well as public and political—to welcome this complexity without making it a *representative* of any one collective identity shows the limits of the system of representativeness in the public arena when confronted with the Other.

Bert Williams has been defined as “the first black performer who could be described as an international pop star” (Chude-Sokei 1): a successful recording artist and theatre performer, he starred in the first all-black production on Broadway, *In Dahomey* (1903), and was the first black entertainer to headline at the Ziegfeld Follies, the renowned high-class vaudeville show. During his long career from the 1890s to the 1920s, his work as producer and artist opened the business for black actors and singers, years before the rise of blues and jazz would create a recognized space for black performativity. Yet, his work remains highly problematic, as he achieved visibility and success by performing the black coon, a staple character from US white minstrel shows: in a time when intellectuals such as W.E.B. DuBois supported the idea that

emancipation meant the cultural re-appropriation of blackness,<sup>1</sup> Williams' success was inexorably linked to his interpretation of the Jonah Man, a variation on the plantation darky character from blackface minstrel shows.

This character included most staple marks of stereotypical blackness, including blackface (paradoxically for a black, though light-skinned, actor); consequently, scholars and intellectuals from various fields have felt reasonably uneasy in dealing with this performer whose act apparently paid more than lip service to white expectations:

previous eras have witnessed the manipulation of this man, the wilful forgetting of this problematic figure in burnt cork. His representations of blackness onstage troubled those in the audience who desired radical resistance. His persistent use of blackface alienated those members of the public who demanded the rejection of conventions. Yet during his life, Williams did endeavor to take control of his career and his image. He struggled to be seen as more than a comedian or a stereotype. He recognized his representative role among blacks, yet refused leadership. (Forbes xii)

This point is crucial to Phillips, himself a black Caribbean artist moving between England and the US.<sup>2</sup> This accounts for the metaliterary dialogue between Williams as historical figure and Phillips the writer persona, as emerges, for example, in the selection of quotes from interviews and statements from the artist which appear throughout the novel. On the one hand, this choice helps the reader separate Phillips' voice from Williams' by the shift from the novel's predominant third person narrator to a more intimate first person. On the other, the chosen quotes actually highlight the similarities between the performer's and the writer's self-location: "This may sound snobbish, though it isn't; I'm not a native of the United States, but a West Indian, and I must take solace from my philosophy so long as I can earn my livelihood in this country" (Williams qtd. in Phillips 122-123).

This device locates the writer on the receiving end of Williams' legacy, identifying writing as one among many ways of performing blackness in the US. From this perspective, Williams must be considered as one nodal point in a network of performers, across the last and this century, who have dealt with the plethora of stereotypes that inform the representation of black characters in performance both inside and outside the US. In an interview published on the Random House website, the writer draws the connection in these terms:

I had recently finished a long essay about Marvin Gaye (published in *A New World Order*, 2001) in which I had explored the stereotypes that bind black performers in America. ... This also coincided with a growing interest I had in how hip-hop performers in particular were presenting themselves (and being presented) to the wider American audience. There seemed to be an aspect of performative minstrelsy to some of their work. ("Author Interview")

Phillips hence traces a lineage of black artists (especially, but not exclusively, singers) who in the past as well as now have been haunted by the ghost of the blackface

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<sup>1</sup> The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was born in 1909 in the same New York which was witnessing Bert Williams' success; Du Bois was among the founders of the association, with which he collaborated until 1934 (Lewis 370).

<sup>2</sup> As the biography published on his website reads, Phillips was born in St. Kitts; when he was four months old his parents brought him to Britain, where he grew up in Leeds. He now lives in New York ("Biography").

minstrel.<sup>3</sup> He also implies that these performative practices are still part of the deal black performers have to sign into in order to gain access to the global cultural market. As the writer sees it, the black performer still has to pose as a representative of her/his race, perpetuating the cultural stereotypes associated with black culture.

This reading of Williams and his epigones exposes the proximity of the cultural and the political meaning of *representation*; yet what also emerges here is the contradictions of a democracy where access to representation is limited to accepted cultural forms. In their *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam trace the overlapping of the cultural and political meaning of *representation* by remarking the contamination between the ideal of representative government in Western democracies and the struggle for cultural representation faced by ethnic minorities:

what all these instances share is the semiotic principle that something is ‘standing for’ something else, or that some person or group is speaking on behalf of some other persons or groups. On the symbolic battlegrounds of the mass media, the struggle over representation in the simulacral realm homologizes that of the political sphere, where questions of imitation and representation easily slide into issues of delegation and voice. (183)

Quite interestingly, here Shohat and Stam refer to Bert Williams himself as paramount example of how the ethnic Other is excluded from the system of representative politics as well as from cultural visibility, as s/he is subject to stereotyping and to the burden of representing difference in the terms dictated by hegemonic discourses: “the tradition of blackface recital furnished one of the most popular of American pop-cultural forms. Even Black minstrel performers like Bert Williams ... were obliged to carry the mark of caricature on their own bodies; burnt cork literalized, as it were, the trope of Blackness” (189). Representation hence becomes both political and allegorical: “within hegemonic discourse every subaltern performer/role is seen as synecdochically summing up a vast but putatively homogeneous community” (183).

In order to deconstruct this paradigm, Phillips’ novel exposes the actual heterogeneity of the black community in Harlem, and how it complicates the representativeness of Williams as a West Indian performer in the US. This clearly emerges in the novel’s prologue, written in a first person that places itself chronologically after Williams’ life and from this vantage point narrates how Harlem looked like at the time of the performer’s heyday:

Tan maidens, with peachy bleached skins and recently straightened hair, stepped around tall muscular men fresh off the ships from the Caribbean, who in turn rubbed shoulders with excited southerners who had tilled enough soil for a dozen lifetimes and were overjoyed to have finally arrived in the north. And then, of course, there were the formerly enslaved New Yorkers who could trace their ties with the city back to the entrepreneurial, but mean-spirited, Dutch. Quick everybody, hurry uptown to the barbershops and restaurants and funeral homes that colored men now owned in New York City. Hurry home to Harlem. *West Indian* Bert Williams’ Harlem. (5)

The variety of the neighbourhood’s population seems to be summed up by Williams, a West Indian who emigrated to the US as a child and entered the show business via vaudevilles and medicine shows by appropriating a genre—blackface

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<sup>3</sup> This point is addressed, though in a more nuanced perspective, in Robert Townsend’s documentary *Why We Laugh. Black Comedians on Black Comedy* (2009), where Bert Williams features as the pioneer of black American vaudeville and comedianship.

minstrelsy—which was originally performed by white professionals who in their turn both celebrated and denigrated the culture and music of black communities from the South, in what Eric Lott notoriously named a relation of “love and theft.” In this sense, Williams’ mongrel art form is opposed by the first person narrator to the later Harlem of nightclubs, where a constructed pseudo-nativism makes “the clumsy metal hooves of Bojangles stomp ... poor Africa to death” (5).

Phillips offers a portrayal of Williams as a “colored” performer, rather than as an African American one. In this sense, Williams introduces the Caribbean as a further space of negotiation of a black American identity, a space contiguous but *different* from the one occupied by African Americans. The same point, though in different terms, is tackled by Camille Forbes, who opens her *Introducing Bert Williams* with a “Note on Usage” which reads: “In this work, I use the terms “black” and “African American” interchangeably. I refrain from naming Williams as “African American,” however, because he always spoke of his ethnicity as West Indian. Instead I refer to him as black, or Negro, a term that he used to refer to himself” (ix).

The most troublesome element of Williams’ work for contemporary scholars lies in the positive reception he received among white audiences, which capitalized on a notion of authenticity based on the assumption that he was a true representative of the stereotypical African American character he was portraying on stage. This theme is particularly dear to Phillips, who weaves his novel around the recurring image of Williams repeatedly taking on and off his blackface makeup as a way to reinstate the *difference* between himself and his character over and over again. The relationship between the performer and the character is described as a continuous negotiation between the need to be a delegate of a certain performative tradition and the necessity to show that this is just a fiction showing the ability of the entertainer to give life to a character:

Do the audience understand that his character, this Shylock Homestead whose dull-witted antics amuse them, bears no relationship to the real Egbert Austin Williams? Every evening this question worries him, and every evening as he takes his curtain call he tries to ignore it, but he often lies in his bed late into the night trying to calculate where he might force a little more laughter here, or squeeze an inch more room to work with there, and therefore impress them with the overwhelming evidence of his artistry. (Phillips 12)

Not only the white audience, but the African American community as well cannot discern the difference between Williams and his character: while white audiences see Williams as a representative of the African American community, black ones reject him as the reiterated embodiment of a denigrating stereotype. Proxy for this gaze in the novel is Williams’ partner, African American George Walker, to whose eyes this overlapping of person and character is both manifest and troubling: “Sometimes Bert behaves as though his makeup is an extra layer of skin that he cannot rub away, and George worries that perhaps both Bert’s unfortunate blackface performance *and* his disturbingly accommodating personality are becoming somewhat confused in his partner’s mind” (110).

Walker, on the other hand, explicitly endorses the political meaning of what it means to be a delegate of the black American community in the newly-dawned twentieth century:

times have changed now and we should no longer be standing up in front of the white man and delivering simplistic stories with the right amount of darky naivete. I mean, let me ask you, how many of our own

people are truly happy to just eat watermelon, or fall over on their faces, or mispronounce the English language? Time to put the cork to one side, Bert. (123)

The different attitude between the West Indian Bert and the African American George is portrayed in the novel as a shift in the meaning of their performance: while Bert tries to prove his artistry by an act of creation, by giving life to a character which does not exist in real life, George mirrors the white audience's belief that the performance of a black entertainer *must* necessarily be representative of her/his community.

Williams rejects this role in favour of a wider idea of performance as excising an emotional response from audiences of any colour: "the essence of my performance is that we know and sympathize with this unfortunate creature" (180). According to Phillips, it is the inability to enact his performative utopia, where the blackface would make the performer's own skin color unsubstantial—instead of enhancing it—that eventually breaks Williams. His performance does not manage to avoid the inevitable conflation of Bert and his character that the system of representative democracy requires as the only way to access political and cultural visibility from a subaltern position—what the character eventually defines "the true misery of his own condition" (172).

Only refuge from this misery become his dreams, where he goes back to his native Caribbeans:

He dreams vividly, and in full color. ... He dreams of the warm tropical Caribbean, and a childhood of few cares and concerns; he dreams of a boyhood blessed with books and sun and sand and long hot days that merge one into the other as though the world will for evermore proceed in a seamless pattern of Caribbean indolence. ... His hot Caribbean part undermined by cold American anxieties, and his tired mind still spinning backward, trying eagerly to reclaim the Bahamian beach that, all those years ago, his parents gave up for Florida. (23)

This utopian space, a forever lost homeland, is the place Williams longs to go back to: in the last part of the novel, written in Bert's first person, the performer finally speaks from the afterlife about freeing himself from the burden of representation by going back to his native island:

Here in the darkness, beyond my wife, my journey is over and I shall perform no more. I will no longer be tormented with the anxiety of being the sole *representative* in the room. ... It is unfair to ask a man to travel his one precious life bearing this burden, and I am tired, so please leave me alone in the darkness and let me search for my father, who is also lost. (209)

Williams' father was lost to him, in Phillips' account, from the first and only time he had seen his son perform in blackface: looking for his father, Bert is also trying to reappropriate the Caribbean identity that was effaced by the need to become a delegate of the African American community he never felt he wholly belonged to. By casting Williams as a Caribbean performer, Phillips highlights the rift between US and Caribbean racial performativity; emphasizing the difference of the Caribbean context, he poses Williams' performing body as a crucial nexus for a negotiation of democratic representation in a social context constructed on racial difference. Williams was able to engage with the democratic rhetoric of the US public discourse by becoming a producer as well as an actor, thus advocating agency for black performers both at the workplace and in community politics; yet, Phillips refrains from writing William's biography as an

overall success story by highlighting the limits of a representative ideal of democratic participation in the cultural as well as in the political arena.

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FIORENZO IULIANO

THE END OF THE WORLD NOVEL. STRATEGIES OF LUST AND SURVEILLANCE  
IN BRET E. ELLIS'S *THE RULES OF ATTRACTION*

The apocalyptic title I have chosen for my paper draws on one of the places where the novel I am going to discuss is set. The End of the World, indeed, is a pub located on the Camden College campus, where most of the action narrated in *The Rules of Attraction* takes place. The End of the World is, moreover, the name of the majestic party that opens the novel itself, where the protagonists witness the coming to a dead end of the multiple and crossing attractions mentioned in the title. To their utmost surprise and disappointment, they suddenly realize that their need to fully know and understand each other is destined to never be satisfied, since all they can grasp is the mere surface of things. Their fantasized worlds of love and complete intimacy, thus, miserably ends, leaving all of them frustrated and dissatisfied.

The events narrated in this novel, published by Bret Easton Ellis in 1987, date back to 1985. In the same year, apocalyptic echoes were resonating in a very different book, written by the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. At the very beginning of the book, Habermas mentions the title of a conference he had held few years before, that summarizes his idea of modernity, abruptly defined as “an unfinished project” (*Philosophical Discourse* xix). This obsession with momentous resolutions, so intensely felt in the late 1980s, was finally expressed in two books published in 1992 by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, which predicted the eventual global triumph of political and economic liberalism.

This troublesome sense of fear and expectation pervades intensely Ellis's novel. Entwining the stories of three students at an Ivy League fictional college in New England, the writer effectively depicts the generation of young adults during the Reagan era, when the collapse of communism and the beginning of a new historical phase were looming on the horizon and yet so hard to foresee, thus casting a shadow of anxiety and uncertainty on the lives of the protagonists. As I will try to demonstrate, the novel, by recounting the private lives of three people in their early twenties during the Yuppie Age, bridges us back to the dawn of capitalism in eighteenth century Europe, by insisting on those aspects of private life that, back then, had reshaped the domains of the public and the private in bourgeois societies. In this respect, the reference to Habermas sounds all the more convincing, since it is Habermas's work that has explored the redefinition of private and intimate spaces as a turning point in early capitalistic Europe. Both the end of the world prophesied by Ellis and the never-ending project of modernity theorized by Habermas, require an analysis of the moment when this very world began. Consequently, a study of the rules that have differentiated public from private spaces helps us better grasp the genesis and the different articulations of modern capitalism.

Habermas's book, on the one hand, has thoroughly analyzed these rules; Ellis's novel, on the other, has subtly satirized them.

There is a relation between the ways in which both texts represent the definition of the intimate sphere in opposition with the public one, as a characteristic of the modern age. While Habermas describes its genesis, Ellis focuses on its tragicomic collapse.

*The Rules of Attraction* narrates the personal experiences of the three protagonists in their Freshman year at Camden, an Ivy League college in New England. The writer morbidly insists on attraction and sex: Lauren uses pictures of venereal diseases as a means to control her own sexual desire and defer the moment when she would become sexually active. Paul is hopelessly attracted to Sean, the male anti-hero of the novel. Sean, who is in love with Lauren, is incapable of reconciling his sexual drives with his romantic feelings. The three main characters stage a complex and sophisticated pantomime of the interplay between the control of the self and a devouring urge to consume sexuality and relationships as ordinary commodities, as a response to the dominant yuppie ideology of the 1980s.

*The Rules of Attraction* perfectly balances Ellis's debut novel, *Less Than Zero*, published in 1985, where the protagonist, Clay, goes back to his hometown Los Angeles during a college break; in *The Rules of Attraction*, instead, it is college life that acquires prominence in Ellis's attempt to portray the post-baby boomer generation, thus drawing attention to how crucial the spatial structuring of both novels is to their whole narrative economy. While *Less Than Zero* reproduces an always expanding spatial dimension, mirroring the off-centered configuration of Los Angeles, the campus where the action of *The Rules of Attraction* takes place is, predictably, rendered as an enclosed structure, easy to observe and envisage. The rules established among Sean, Paul and Lauren revolve around a tangible erotic tension that is never resolved, thus working as an absent center that allows the story to go on, though reaching no climax nor final resolution. Erotic tension gravitates around a blank spot, a central void, which turns out to be, in the narrative economy of the text, the impossibility for the protagonists to deeply know each other. Each of the three narrators, in fact, elaborates the image of the other two through fantasies or projections; even though fantasized images of the others inevitably crumble when confronted with reality, they nevertheless follow a pre-ordered drive that leads to the zero-degree of mutual knowledge and knowability. The sentence that, resignedly, closes the novel, bluntly states: "No one will ever know anyone. We just have to deal with each other. You're not ever gonna know me" (Ellis 291). This drastic conclusion has been often dismissed as an overt disapproval of and a simple moralistic attack against the superficiality and the consumerism of the 1980s. Yet, as often happens with Ellis's novels (*American Psycho* probably is, in this sense, the most outstanding example), a moralistic reading of the text just misses its crucial and subtle political implications. However, as right as such a conclusion may be in its broadest sense, it fails to take into account the structural role that this strongly affirmed hollowness actually plays in a novel centered on attraction and constructed as a system of forces creating a magnetic field. From this perspective, in fact, the void produced by the impossibility of deeply and completely knowing each other works as a stabilizing element, which compensates for the possible imbalances determined by attraction.

My reading of *The Rules of Attraction*, as I was arguing before, benefits from the by now canonic theorization of private vs. public space carried out by Jürgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Habermas's thought, which I have referred to with relation to the apocalyptic overtone used to evoke and describe the 'end' of the world (and of modernity), proves useful again to understand

how the space of campus is theorized and ideologically elaborated. As I will try to argue, Habermas's conception of modernity, constructed through a redefinition of the domains of the public and the private, is mockingly taken up and brought to its extreme consequences in *The Rules of Attraction*, whose open and disappointing ending leaves no hope for the fulfillment of any attempted project, be it merely outlined by the rules of the attraction Ellis mentions, or, more ambitiously, by modernity in its entirety, as Habermas had stated.

In its effort to vividly depict the protagonists of the terminal phase of US capitalism, Ellis's novel acts out a performative parody of the processes that had marked, as Habermas reminds us, the rise of bourgeois power in eighteenth century Europe, narrating its downfall at the end of the twentieth century. Public sphere, in the late 1980s United States, is constructed as a dimension that, rather than privatizing intimate relationships, as Habermas had theorized for the eighteenth century Europe, utterly exploits their performative potential. In *The Rules of Attraction*, college campus is configured as a panoptical space that ascribes a distinct role to its inhabitants; the novel, as a whole, enacts a mechanism through which sex and relations are deprivatized and gradually incorporated into a public dimension governed according to previously defined, albeit implicit and mostly unknown, rules. This deprivatizing turn accounts for the title of the novel, which insists not just on attraction as a merely sexual drive but on the rules that turn sexual attraction into an ordering principle that defines the college as a public sphere in its own right.

Habermas points out that, in eighteenth century, the domestic and familiar space, gradually institutionalized, had become the locus where the mediation between individuals and society could be negotiated. He maintains that the patriarchal family was a scene of psychological emancipation, that "seemed to be established voluntarily and by free individuals and to be maintained without coercion; it seemed to rest on the lasting community of love on the part of the two spouses; it seemed to permit that non-instrumental development of all faculties that marks the cultivated personality" (*Public Sphere* 46-7).

The definition of the divide between the public and the private, which, according to Habermas, has marked a crucial, though quite blurred, watershed in the historical configuration of modern European societies, is exploited by Ellis as a virtual limit constantly pushed forward. By representing the college campus as a political space, Ellis brings Habermas's reflection to its utmost consequences: the campus, in the novel, is rendered as a visible public space, where the domains of public and private spheres are clearly and recognizably set apart from each other. The space of an extremely individualized private sphere is theoretically located in the individual rooms where each student lives, so that the campus comes to be conceived as a structure juxtaposing very small private rooms, on the one hand, and public spaces (classrooms, libraries, students' unions and fraternities, bars and pubs) that should meet the college life need for publicity and sociality, on the other. Yet, in narrative terms, the campus is actually constructed through the exposition of the protagonists' private lives as integrally visible, emptying, at the same time, public spaces of their official functions and resignifying them according to the private, and specifically erotic and sexual dynamics at play among the characters. The performative character of campus life, thus, subverts its official balance of public function and private space: the narrative rendering of the protagonists' lives, in fact, shows how private rooms are the real, and probably the only, public spaces on campus, discrete places where the definition of the protagonists' identities as college students is complied with and acted out, thus performing in the

private dimension of the single room what an unstated, implicit behavior code imposes on each student.

On the contrary, public space is completely cleared of any social function. The novel never mentions, for instance, students' academic life, as if it had no real part in defining their public status as students. The campus public dimension, thus, is not marked by the rhythm of academic life, but only by the private activities where the protagonists individually perform the unwritten rules of their temporary condition as freshmen. Again, the novel seems to evoke the terms of Habermas's discussion of the modern family, while portraying the young generation far away from the family. Habermas theorizes privacy as an ideological structure capable of rendering its constitutive component, the bourgeois family, totally oblivious of its real origins, which is ultimately ascribable to economic factors. The distinctive traits of this ideology, according to Habermas, can be found in the three aforementioned characteristics: voluntariness, community of love, and cultivation. Ellis's characters, indeed, take Habermas's reflections literally; yet, the space of the public and the space of the private have already been deprived of their alleged proper functions, and turned into blank scenes ruled by the unexpressed codes of individual performance.

Performance is, ultimately, the means through which the domains of the private and the public are overturned, and this process is thematized by Ellis as the distinctive trait of campus as a political space. Habermas's definition of ideology, closer to Althusser's than to Marx's because of his insisting on the performative nature of intimacy as a structuring element inside the patriarchal family, is mirrored and fully rendered in the very structure of the novel, where characters speak in first person, reporting their personal experiences though often visibly denying or contradicting what other people say. Habermas affirms that the pure "human" essence of family, ideologically produced by the relations of power interwoven among its members, was expressed and definitely sanctioned through the letter and the diary: "through letter writing the individual unfolded himself in his subjectivity" (*Public Sphere* 48), while the diary is simply defined as "a letter addressed to the sender, and the first-person narrative became a conversation with one's self addressed to another person" (*Public Sphere* 49). Here is the key to grasp the extremely parodic character of Ellis's novel, which, to a certain extent, is also reminiscent of Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. *The Rules of Attraction* is written as a collection of diary entries, in what looks like the perfect ironic replica of the attempt to detach the intimate structure of family from the external, public realm. This process, back in the eighteenth century, was produced and marked by the laws of an emerging capitalism, while, in *The Rules of Attraction*, it is late capitalism, and the force of its well known and nevertheless never overtly nor explicitly recalled rules, that provide the structural (in social and economic terms) frame that allows attraction and its rules to be fully displayed and correctly interact with each other.

The very essence of Ellis's novel, in the end, is textual and discursive. It is not about simple attraction, but about the rules of attraction. However, these rules, rather than simply governing the college campus, actually construct and signify it as a public space, even when it seems to mark the physical space of intimacy, with the assignment of private rooms to each student. It is here that the word rule loses its primary meaning of authoritative and binding instruction, to gain the value it has inside religious orders or communities (eg "the rule of St. Benedict"), which turns full circle with the ominous and apocalyptic threat foreshadowed in my title: not a prescription but a code, a series

of regulations that, rather than imposing their requirements on people, gently mold their behavior and work as the semiotic evidence of an already established practice.

Ellis's novel, thus, by satirically replicating Habermas's analysis of the translation of former public spaces into private ones operated by the bourgeois power in the 18th century and here clearly overturned, dovetails with the recent reflection carried out, among others, by Hardt and Negri in their 2009 *Commonwealth*, about late capitalism as the biopolitical exploitation of emotions, bodies and sex.

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RICHARD KIDDER

THE REACTOR IN THE GARDEN, OR WORKING NATURE OVER

In the afterword to the 2000 edition of *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Leo Marx contends that the kind of study undertaken in that work had been rendered outdated by developments in the field of American Studies in the intervening years, and that such changes might best be characterized by their attention to notions of difference, of “class, ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual preference”; Marx observes that the changes signal “an intellectual and moral turnabout” (382). Steadfast critical and popular categories such as the American Eden, Wilderness, Nation, Frontier, Pioneer and Nature, that had so frequently been taken as givens in works related to Marx’s study, began to creak and then to crumble when subjected to analyses deriving from the attention paid to the just claims of difference noted by Marx in the afterword to his ground-breaking work. In fact not only were many of the basic analytic categories underlying Marx’s analysis subjected to a thoroughgoing set of complex revisions in the years following its publication, but many critical categories that have come to the fore in the successive decades were not even to be glimpsed on the disciplinary event horizon of that work. Two categories that Marx mentions in the Afterword, Landscape and Ecology, may stand in here as metonyms characteristic of the kinds of shifts in attention and focus that mark more recent American Studies.<sup>1</sup> Both of these categories in turn are subtended by the category of Nature itself, a concept frequently foregrounded in recent critical literature.

In synthesizing his argument, Marx indicates “three episodes” characteristic of the pastoral romance:

One is a moment of ecstatic fulfillment, perhaps shared with a companion or lover, when the protagonist enjoys a feeling of transcendent harmony with his surroundings ... It is striking that so many of the conspicuous voices and characters in American literature tend to join the recovery of self with the recovery of the natural, and to represent their deepest longings in numinous visions of landscape. The second episode is the pastoral figure’s thrilling, tonic, yet often terrifying encounter with the wildness: some aspect, external or subjective, of unmodified, intractable or hostile nature. Here, as in the idyll, the narrative in effect arrests the centrifugal impulse with which it began. So does the third episode: the sudden appearance of the machine in the landscape. A distinctive industrial-age feature of the pastoral mode, this intrusive artifact figures forth the unprecedented power and dynamism of the oncoming order, and it exposes the illusory character of the retreat to nature as a way of coping with the ineluctable advance of modernity. (Marx 378)

In this analysis, the boundaries between Landscape, Wildness and Nature seem to become blurred, where the “recovery of the natural,” so fundamental to the pastoral mode, is given through “numinous visions of landscape”; where “wildness” is seen in terms of “unmodified, intractable, or hostile nature”; and where the intrusion of the machine into the landscape “exposes the illusory character of the retreat to nature” in the face of the advance of

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<sup>1</sup> For a rather more systematic recapitulation of important recent tendencies in the field, see John Carlos Rowe (2010).

modernity. Insightful and rich as this analysis is, however, numerous observations may be offered. To begin with, the very separation of landscape and nature is in itself problematic as it denotes a kind of dualism that depends on the separation of subject and object, instead of acknowledging the constitutive power of forms of landscape.<sup>2</sup> In the analysis, perceiver and perceived seem to exist side by side. The nature that the subject perceives is “unmodified, intractable, or hostile”: the claim to universality precludes, for example, the Native American, for whom “nature” or “landscape” did not in the 19th century, and do not presently conform to these descriptions, but for whom the relation to the land has been determined by the needs of the imperial project.<sup>3</sup> Recent work in Native American Studies only underscores the severe limits imposed by constraining American Studies within the time frame beginning with the European colonization of the North American continent. Indeed, writers not specifically within the sphere of Native American studies such as John McPhee have sought to bring an understanding of the continent outside of the purview of the limits set by the history of colonization and empire.<sup>4</sup>

When Lewis Mumford wrote, in the *Pentagon of Power* in 1970, that “[a]ll thinking worthy of the name must now be ecological, in the sense of utilizing and appreciating organic complexity, and in adapting every kind of change to the requirements not of man alone, or of any single generation, but of all his organic partners and every part of his habitat” (qtd. in Worster 21),<sup>5</sup> he attested the awareness and the anxiety that would soon manifest themselves in the wake of such world-wide phenomena, within two very short years, as the publication of the Report of the Club of Rome in 1972, *The Limits to Growth*, and the role played by OPEC in the 1973 Oil Embargo. These developments put into singular focus the sense of having reached points of no return: exponential demographic growth and the corresponding necessary utilization of earth’s limited resources indicated a wall against which Mother Nature would inexorably be backed.

If these events brought into the popular consciousness an awareness that that which Culture called Nature should be considered finite in terms of its availability as a resource, they also refocused attention on very troubling events that brought into consideration the very definition of nature itself. The development of atomic power out of its purported use in bringing Japan to its knees, and its intended use in demonstrating to the world powers the extent of US military might, with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962, signalled once and for all the end of any idea that Nature proceeds along its merry way, oblivious to the doings of humankind. Nature had in fact been altered in its course at the atomic and at the molecular levels, and as Rachel Carson so painfully demonstrated, there is really no telling what effects, short or long term, that the manipulation of biological and chemical processes will have at the level of evolution.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bonnie Costello (2003), especially Chapter 1, in which Costello demonstrates the manner in which concepts or “visions” of nature necessarily are formed a priori by notions of landscape; Costello argues that Nature is always already cultured, basing her demonstration in great part on the work of Simon Schama (1995).

<sup>3</sup> Since the possible references here are too numerous to mention, two will have to suffice: Simon J. Ortiz (1992) and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1996).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, John McPhee, 1998; 1989.

<sup>5</sup> The passage in Mumford centers on the importance of Darwin for developing an awareness of the interrelatedness of nature and culture: “Not by accident the isolationism and reductionism of orthodox science, following too studiously the conditions laid down by the power system for accelerating all forms of power, is under indictment, because of the catastrophic results of applying such anti-organic concepts to exploiting and controlling living species” (393).

In “Annie Dillard and the *Book of Job*: Notes towards a Postnatural Ecocriticism,” David Mazel lists certain of the essential concepts that have developed out of this awareness of the confluence of the natural and the cultural, of *physis* and *technè*, and closes the list with the following comment: “Taken together, these developments have the potential to implicate the biosphere so completely in human affairs that at some not-too-distant point it might make more sense to think of it as a *technosphere*: “a world designed by people” (188). Of this list, which is comprised of “the deconstruction of nature,” “Postmodern ecology,” “Cyborgism,” “Gene splicing,” “Radical materiality,” “The information model of life,” and “Emergence,” it is the first that is of most interest to us here: “*The Deconstruction of nature*, which understands “nature” and “wilderness” as discursive constructs ineluctably shaped by the desires of the cultures that deploy them, and thus unavailable as guarantors of stable meaning” (Mazel 187).<sup>6</sup> In “Blues in the Green: Ecocriticism under Critique,” Michael Cohen emphasizes the roles that critics from within the discipline of American Studies have played in shaping these materials when he writes of Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*:

Out of Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950), came an awareness of the disparity between the imagined symbolic West, and the actualities, the limits of environmental factors. Out of Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), came the premise that a culture sees its land according to its desires, and this is worked out by following the pastoral ideal in American imagination. Out of William Goetzmann’s *Exploration and Empire* (1966), came the thesis that a culture finds what it seeks. Out of Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), came the idea that a structural link between mind and land was drawn directly from the discussions at the Sierra Club wilderness conferences. Historians and literary critics share these books. At the same time that these writers have explored how we imagine where we live and what we have done to our living spaces, they and others writing in this tradition also care to value and protect these spaces. (9)

The discursive spaces traversed in the intervening years have in great part reflected the concerns adumbrated at the beginning of this text. At the same time, they reflect the efforts of the discipline in very recent times, perhaps too recent, to emphasize the transnational aspects of its own activities and objects. In Gerald Vizenor’s *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57*, these concerns find a common site within the structure of the narrative set in Hiroshima, whose themes include the aftermath of the atomic bomb, nationalism, and questions of identity (Sokolowski, 2010).

There seems in fact nothing more transnational, global, transatlantic, transpacific than life in the technosphere. The disaster of March 11, 2011 in Fukushima underlines the manner in which problems stemming from the earthquake and the subsequent meltdown of the nuclear plant have far-reaching causes and consequences. The reactors themselves were produced and sold by the US multinational, General Electric. And to make a long story very short, the reactors were built to tolerances theoretically capable of withstanding a Richter scale shock of 6.5. The reactors were sold to the Tokyo Electric Corporation knowing that in the past century the area had suffered earthquakes that surpassed the threshold of 6.5. Indeed, the Fukushima earthquake hit level 8 on the Richter scale. But not to be outsmarted by natural events, the commercial and legal arm of General Electric included a clause in the contract that removes all the burden of future malfunctioning, of technical shortcomings, in short, of all legal responsibility from themselves and transfers it to the buyer. In turn, the buyer, and this is the case for almost all contracting power companies that undertake the nuclear option reach an agreement with the municipalities in which they are located through which they undertake the responsibility of disaster management, if something is to happen. Radioactivity does not respect the boundaries of the nation-state nor do the activities of global corporations.

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<sup>6</sup> For the notion of nature as a discursive construct, see William Cronon, 1996.

In his speech of June 10, 2011, given on the occasion of his acceptance of the Catalunya International Prize, the popular Japanese author, Haruki Murakami, argues:

What I'm talking about concretely are the Fukushima nuclear power plants.

As you may know, at least three of the six nuclear plants damaged by the earthquake and the tsunami have not yet been restored and continue to leak radioactivity around them. Meltdown occurred and the surrounding soil has been contaminated. Water contaminated by radioactivity, has been drained to the surrounding ocean. The wind is spreading radioactivity to wider areas.

Hundreds of thousands people had to evacuate their homes. Farms, ranches, factories and ports are abandoned, deserted by all. Those who had lived there may not be able to return. I'm really sorry that the damage from this accident will spread across the country.

The reason why such a tragic accident occurred is more or less clear. The people who built these nuclear plants had not imagined that such a large tsunami would strike them. Some specialists pointed out that tsunamis of similar scale had struck these regions previously and insisted that the safety standards should be revised, but the electrical power companies ignored them, because the electrical power companies, as commercial ventures, didn't want to invest significantly in preparing for a tsunami which may occur once in hundreds of years. (Murakami, 2011)

Numerous aspects of the speech are pertinent to the arguments presented here, mainly that Nature is now to be understood not simply as something that exists outside the realm of the human, or even that is to be understood as a social construct, but that it is, in the most direct and brutal sense altered in irrevocable ways that are extremely harmful to all forms of life. And that these alterations thenceforth are part of the deep structural biological and geological time scale. Previous conceptions of Nature simply do not apply, and have little functional relevance. For Murakami the possibilities of intervention subsist on the level of the ethical and the moral, realms in which literature may be most efficacious.

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GIUSEPPE LOMBARDO

DEMOCRACY AND DIFFERENCE IN JERRE MANGIONE'S *MOUNT ALLEGRO*

"A place-name for a place no longer there" (*Mount Allegro* 308): it is the scathing definition of "Mount Allegro," the suburban neighborhood in Rochester, New York, where Jerre Mangione grew up, the lively *scenario* of his "Memoir of Italian American Life." Mangione published *Mount Allegro* in 1943,<sup>1</sup> setting a model which was year after year imitated by other writers with no small success. In his perspective, words are the ultimate reality for an immigrant world subject to the physical and ideological pressure of society at large, evoked through memory and *nostalgia*. People, he says, gather together and mark places with the material and social organization of their resources. But people and places change, even disappear with the passing of time. They continue living as long as their names are on the lips of their descendants, as long as life and death are assumed as the basic cyclical pattern of human experience. In the case of Mount Allegro, "the last physical reminder ... was finally bulldozed into the compost of local history" in 1973, and within the "22-acre tract" which was its core "stretches ... a five-million-dollar Coca-Cola bottling plant ... a low-slung box of a building, not unlike the shape of a coffin, totally surrounded by a formidable barbed-wire fence" (*Mount Allegro* 287-288).

This dramatic keynote sounds throughout the pages of the "Finale," the chapter appended to the 1981 edition of the work, which summarizes its "method and scope," as it were, and reconstructs the last years in Mount Allegro. The tone is gloomy and tragic events build up, eventually resulting in a melancholy catalogue of the deaths which take away the prominent members of the family. In the mid-sixties, while race riots upset Rochester's traditional mosaic of communities coexisting side by side, the writer's father passes over (1962), and his mother, notwithstanding the protests of her children who fear for her safety, boldly refuses to abandon the old house and her new black and Puerto Rican neighbors among whom she had made friends. Then comes the turn for Uncle Luigi and Uncle Nino, the latter lying in a hospital bed and fiercely protesting against his nephew who refuses him a "poison pill" which would put an end to his unsufferable pains and let him die with dignity. The mother's death, seven years later than her husband, carries away "the main protagonist ... and the most valiant," the true "dominant family figure" who "with her gift of insight and earthy wisdom" keeps the group of Sicilians united and proud of the vitality of their ancestry roots in a foreign

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<sup>1</sup> The publishing history of *Mount Allegro* runs through a series of subsequent editions aptly prefaced by different critics. The 1<sup>st</sup> edition, illustrated by Peggy Beacon, was issued in 1943 by Houghton Mifflin in Boston. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, with an introduction by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, was printed by Knopf (New York) in 1952. Maria Cimino wrote the introduction to the 4<sup>th</sup> edition in 1972 (New York: Crown). The 5<sup>th</sup> edition, with a new concluding chapter ("Finale") and introduction by Herbert J. Gans, came out as *Mount Allegro. A Memoir of Italian American Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.

land (*Mount Allegro* 298). Slowly, the family reunions typical of the best years of “Mount Allegro” become less “frequent” and not so “noisy and prolonged” as they once were. The old spirit of conviviality is gone, even though the “food courses” are duplicated and uncles, aunts, and cousins talk “in Sicilian at the top of their voices” while “the upcoming fourth generation” of young children generally ignore their commands, being absorbed in a “cacophony” of shouts and laughter, a disheartening din covering all attempts at mutual exchange and solidarity (*Mount Allegro* 300).

Perhaps, it is precisely this frustrating loss of identity that pushes the writer towards a more objective approach to the experience of his family within the context of the progressive assimilation of Italian Americans in the “melting pot.” It is as if the nightmare of the bulldozing of Mount Allegro and the parallel emerging of the monster Coca-Cola plant, would contribute to the opening of a sort of Dickinsonian, intimate window, from which he offers an original perspective of a reality he feels in terms of a *nostalgia* that must be checked one way or another. The slow process implies a sort of distancing from the “matter,” the search for a voice which may evoke the past without any compromise from the point of view of the emotions and sentiments he cherished for so many years and in changing circumstances. The father- and mother-figures, intensely recast in the live gallery of uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and so on, are sketched out with extraordinary accuracy and brilliance, in a language that has flexibility and sociological density, without any surrendering to the conventional, stereotyped model which ethnic prejudices and the movies imposed on Italian immigrants, while real people were exploited to the advantage of the American capitalist system of production.<sup>2</sup>

By and large, the second term of the guiding dyad in our workshop, that is “difference,” comes to the forefront, so to speak, in the compelling net of conflicting forces which enclose with a barrier and block the development of the community of Sicilians (or Italians) in America. Ethnic difference, we would say, which soon translates into the well-known racial and linguistic differences. These connoted the unique world of “Mount Allegro,” assumed as an epitome of the immigrant universe taken as a whole. Mangione approaches it with a personal though intellectually honest outlook. He candidly acknowledges that the “overriding motive in writing *Mount Allegro* was to recapture the world from which I had escaped while it was still fresh in my memory,” even if the idea “to produce a work that might help dispel some of the more spurious clichés pinned to the image of Italian Americans by an uninformed American public,” strongly urged (*Mount Allegro* 302). The reconciliation of the two

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<sup>2</sup> The complexity of Mangione’s perspective on the remote and recent past of the Sicilian community in Rochester, New York, is brilliantly captured by William Boelhower in its “folkloric popular *humus*.” A distinctive “social voice” analyzes the “subaltern condition ... and cultural patrimony ... of Sicilian immigrants,” and their continuous referring to a mixture of “legend, fable, ... the commonsense wisdom of their popular ethnic culture” (205-206). Starting from the same premises, Justin Vitiello, in a lengthy article, has mounted a harsh attack on Mangione’s “sense of duality as to what it means to be Italian-or more precisely, Sicilian-in America and American toting the stigma of Sicilian heritage.” The writer admits he is “quagmired between the culture of origin and the new world.” He “is thus driven to reinvent a past based on false myths,” in a “prose work written by a literate individual bent more on ahistorical self-realization and what [Werner] Sollors calls ‘self-exoticization’ in an American mould than on the preservation and adaptation of a people’s cultural and historical identity.” Even more violent the conclusion of the essay: “This, to make a long story short, is petty-bourgeois gossip: vanity and pastime. It is harmless, though, as long as we do not presume that it gives us a sense of Sicilian culture. If we were to do so, we would only perpetuate the confusion as to what most ethnic literature in the United States actually is: unredeemably American” (67, 69, 73).

opposite impulses (the autobiographical and the sociological) comes as a result of the book's moving far from the rhetorical strategy of the conventional memoir; as writing progressed, the "chief protagonists" asserted their unmistakable Sicilian perspective, so that, Mangione concludes, "I thought it wise to let them have their say, as long as I could have mine" (*Mount Allegro* 302).<sup>3</sup>

The coexistence in the book of two distinct voices, the narrative one encompassing, by turns, the various referential points of view alternating on the scene of Mount Allegro, allows the artist to reach an unexpected result. Instead of reading "difference" as a sort of sociological database (something like "economic structure" in the Marxian sense), conditioning in a passive way the actual behaviour of people, he gives credit to a dynamic view of "difference" as the core of the Sicilian ancestry of the community, which in America plays the same role played in Italy, that of an active defence of a collective identity adjusting itself to the ever-impending challenges time brings about. Mangione speaks in psychological terms, but his obvious target is ideological, that is the continuity through the ages of a Sicilian "reading" of the world which builds around the notion of "*destino*," an over-ordained axiological concept shaping individual lives and blindly tipping the scales with no attention to an abstract idea of justice.<sup>4</sup>

Psychologically, at least, the immigrants were better off than their children. *They* had no identity problem. With their old-world pragmatism ground into them by centuries of foreign domination, they could accept the difficulties of living among foreigners with foreign customs; hence their lack of outrage at anti-Italian bigotry. Yet for all their wisdom, they failed to see the dilemma of their American-born children who were constantly being pulled in two opposite directions: by the parents with their insistence on their own philosophy and customs, and by the teachers who promoted ideas diametrically opposed to theirs. (*Mount Allegro* 307)

"Difference" as seen through the eyes of Sicilian emigrants becomes the organizing center of the universe of *Mount Allegro*, a veritable duplication of Sicily grafted on American land, a conservative reality whose front and back entrances are watchfully

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<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Franco Mulas, answering a core question ("How would you classify your book *Mount Allegro*?"), Mangione is keen and exceptionally rich in particulars as to the composition of the book: "Well, I think the closest category would be a memoir, a memoir which allows me to talk about these people and occasionally about myself, in order to have the reader understand my relationship with the characters and my own kind of Pilgrim's Progress: from being a kind of confused Italian-American living in two cultures, to observing them and writing about them objectively, as I came to understand them, as I grew older and more mature—and also from a distance. If I had never left Rochester, I would never have been able to write about them as I have. I had to leave because constantly surrounded by relatives as I was, it was impossible to get enough perspective, to achieve any kind of objectivity. When I did achieve that objectivity I had been out of college for maybe five or six years, and I felt I understood these people. I could also contrast them with the non-Sicilian and non-Italian world in which I found myself, and realize their characteristics, their differences, and also appreciate them, and in a sense miss the kind of feelings they had about life, which I did not find in my so-called American environment. But at the same time I was attracted to the American environment because I felt it looked forward; it was a progressive thing, not static. The Sicilian environment was a static one. I think the tragedy of the immigrants was that they tried to keep it static. They tried to keep it as much as possible like the environment they had known back home [in Italy], and this created all kinds of problems for themselves and especially for their children" (75).

<sup>4</sup> See Gardaphé, 2003. "Mangione's life and writing, in many respects, are attempts to escape Sicilian notions of 'destino.' He tells us that his relatives' lives are governed by traditions and myths. ... Throughout *Mount Allegro* we get the sense that the narrator is documenting the decline of a people, the end of an era, an era that becomes history the moment the narrator separates himself from his immigrant relatives" (56).

guarded against possible inrushes from the outer space. “Difference” from the prospective angle of the American society is the obvious connotation of any minority group in search of progressive assimilation into the “melting pot,” a dynamic status which evolves day after day, dissolving the Old World identity into the American mainstream. The irrefutable drama of immigration is that of the American-born sons and daughters who are protected by the community of Sicilians through the active deconstruction of any American pattern of behaviour and the imposition of an identity they no longer accept nor understand.

It is precisely at the crossroads of these conflicting forces that the second element of our “dyad,” that is “democracy,” steps in full play. Democracy is the active pole, the American driving force. It has no place in the everyday texture of the immigrants’ life. They cannot define or accept it, they try to resist its influence on the minds of their sons and daughters, engaging their families in a desperate battle in defence of the crumbling identities they brought from the Old World. The “incessant tug-of-war” (*Mount Allegro* 307), as Mangione puts it, between community and society marks the daily life in *Mount Allegro*, resulting at the end in a double type of alienation: alienation from Sicilian traditions and beliefs, which the youngest members of each group treasure and obey out of respect for their parents’ authority but which they feel to be a legacy of the past, a source of encumbrance on the road to the difficult and risky business of becoming Americans; and alienation from the American world *tout court*, a reality which parents accept and suffer in order to survive, while at the same time resisting it and misrepresenting its true nature as a series of traps and snares ready to emasculate the Sicilian immigrant as soon as he falls into. The future of women is even more scaring: their being, in a way, “Americanized,” through the adoption of American patterns of behaviour or, even worse, through falling in love with American males, turns them into “lost women,” with the obvious, expected, “sexual” overtones.

In-between emasculation and sexual exploitation, the extreme side bands of the social spectrum, lies the whole range of possible choices open to the immigrants’ sons in their way to a questionable integration. “Democracy” as the center of attraction is the North Star around which their new world identity organizes, slowly decentering themselves from the centripetal forces of *sicilianità* and *destino* which blindly try to impair their efforts toward liberation. In a series of brilliant “double” chapters (such as “American Patterns” and “Welcome to Girgenti”), Mangione tells this tale of endurance and initiation, building up on “difference” as the reverse of the medal. He gives us the core of *Mount Allegro* as the exemplary path to the world of rebirth, a network of the values of equality and justice (i.e. *democracy*), capable of dispelling the “unassailable dragon” of tradition which tries to devour his characters’ lives, paving thus the way to an American perspective which teaches that “every man is the architect of his own fortune,” that “anyone who works hard and has plenty of ambition can achieve anything he wants,” and that “Abe Lincoln got to be President of the United States and so can you and you” (*Mount Allegro* 80).

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STEFANO LUCONI

HOW WIDE IS THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN “CIRCLE OF THE ‘WE’”?

In *Postethnic America*, David A. Hollinger suggests that “the making of new affiliations” (166) is an outstanding feature of US society. In this view, attachments are not immutable and static but situational as they tend to broaden over time, reflecting the inclusiveness of American democracy and the ensuing erosion of differences. As a result, the radius of what Hollinger calls the “Circle of the ‘We’” has undergone a continuous extension, following the collapse of the barriers separating minorities and preventing their incorporation within the mainstream.

While racial consciousness still remains the main identity signifier in present-day United States (Roediger), for the ethnic groups from European backgrounds the phenomenon of reaching out to other minorities has led to the progressive “whitening” of the immigrants’ progeny. The newcomers’ children and grandchildren have gradually replaced the self-images based on their respective national ancestries with the awareness of belonging to a larger “white America.” Such an outcome has originated from both the rise in the social ladder and the backlash at the alleged encroachments of African Americans, who supposedly threatened the ethnics’ achievements and encouraged the descendants of the European immigrants to join forces across the divide of national origins (Pinder).

In the case of Italian Americans, the journey toward whiteness has been more crooked. *Campanilismo* stifled national identity and encouraged senses of affiliation that drew upon a multiplicity of local roots in the native land at the beginning of the immigrants’ stay in the United States between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Therefore, before becoming white, people of diverse Italian extractions had first to develop the concept of being Italian.

Autobiographies—“the literary genre of immigration” (Serra 11)—and fictional works by authors of Italian ancestry are among the sources that can be used to investigate how this ethnic minority has transformed its identity over time. They offer insights into the shift of Italian Americans’ self-perception from a localistic allegiance and the construction of an affiliation based on national roots to the longing for assimilation as whites within the rediscovery of the ancestral heritage.

Narratives about the early stages of the Italian presence in the United States in the era of mass immigration between the late 1880s and the early 1920s are replete with examples of surviving *campanilismo* from the newcomers’ land of birth. For instance, in her memoirs, Grace Billotti Spinelli—a native of Calascibetta in the province of Enna—confesses that “although I used to speak of Italy with some authority, I know now that I always thought of it as Sicily” (2). Likewise, to Rosa Cavalieri, an immigrant from Lombardy, her own concept of Italy hardly went beyond the borders of her native region or at least of the northern section of the peninsula. In her opinion, southerners

“were not Italians—they were Sicilians” (Ets 232). Consequently, she gave vent to stereotypes that further stressed her separation from people other than Lombards. Specifically, she points out that

The people from *Toscana* they're not good like the people from *Lombardia*. But they're not bad like the people from *Sicilia*. ... The people from *Piemonte* are a little more bad than the people from *Lombardia*, but they come next. *Lombardia* is the last in the world to do wrong things. (Ets 209)

Southerners, too, yielded to localistic prejudices. In his autobiographical novel *Mount Allegro* Jerre Mangione writes that his father maintained that the resident of Carrapipi, a Sicilian village not too far from his birthplace, were “nothing but a population of thieves, blackmailers and murderers” (5). Similarly, author Joseph Napoli remembers that his mother, a native of San Biagio in the province of Messina, looked on fellow Sicilians from Palermo with scorn. With even greater vehemence, she portrayed Italians from other regions:

Her special detestation was reserved for the Neapolitans. ... She hated them openly. ... With the index and little finger of her left hand she threw “corni”—horns—at their home or when she saw them in the distance. She crossed the street to avoid walking near the house or near them, thus eluding their malice and their own potent evil eye. She hoped the horns would cause the malefactors to be stricken with indescribable diseases, the unmarried daughters to be impregnated by devils, and the family reduced to beggary. (58-59)

Regional antipathies affected radical immigrants, too. For instance, a short time after landing in the United States, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who was born in the province of Cuneo in Piedmont, contended that southern Italians were a bunch of either lazy people or criminals and sometimes turned out to be both (35).

Fictional works also offer evidence of these attitudes among first-generation Italian immigrants. For example, in John Fante's partially autobiographical *1933 Was a Bad Year*, Bettina, Dominic Molise's paternal grandmother, who is from Abruzzi, maintains that “the Potenzese ... were the most ridiculous people in the world ... To the Abruzzese, the people of Potenza were some kind of a national joke, as if they lived in tilted houses and were all dwarfs” (19).

The perception of the diverse dialects Italian newcomers spoke and the ensuing sensitivity to regional variations in language were additional signifiers of local rivalries and divisions. To the ears of author Pascal D'Angelo, another native of the Abruzzi region, for instance, Neapolitans were “loud mouthed” and the Calabrese idiom was “weird,” while the Abruzzese dialect was “soft” (101).

Yet both the Wasp establishment and the other ethnic minorities failed to perceive the immigrants' subnational differences. They not only classified all the newcomers under the same label of Italians, but also discriminated against them regardless of their diverse local backgrounds in the motherland. Fiction by Italian-American writers contains numerous examples of ethnic prejudice targeting Italian immigrants as if they were one single and cohesive group. For instance, one may think of John Fante's “The Odyssey of a Wop” or a few passages in *Wait until Spring*, *Bandini*, especially those involving the widow Effie Hildegarde, who berates the Abruzzese Arturo Bandini because he does not feel proud of the artistic achievements of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel in Rome (176). Memoirs, too, reveal complaints about ethnic discrimination across subnational divisions. For example, Rocco Corresca's “The Biography of a Bootblack” notes that the Irish “insult Italians. They call us Dagoes”

(2867), a derogatory word encompassing the whole national minority. Similarly, Mangione recalls that the Irish forced Italians to sit in segregated sections in movie theaters and that Irish gangs assaulted Italian students on their way to school in some neighborhoods in Philadelphia (Mangione and Morreale 153).

Unqualified anti-Italian intolerance had a homogenizing effect on the diverse geographical cohorts of the immigration waves from Italy. The common experience of what Vanzetti called the "race hatred" that affected all Italians alike in the United States contributed to his fraternal friendship with the Pugliese newcomer Nicola Sacco (73). As Francesco Saracco noted in his unpublished memoirs in outlining the need for overcoming subnational divisions to fight anti-Italian bigotry, "single flowers don't make up a wreath and isolated soldiers cannot win a battle. Only by getting together can soldiers be strong, fight, and protect themselves" (19). Max Ascoli, an anti-Fascist exile who came to the United States in 1931 and was an eye-witness to the transformations of ethnic identities in the interwar years (Grippa), remarked that Italian Americans "were unified into a 'national' block by the other Americans with whom they came to live and who called all of them Italians—or rather 'Wops'" (46), another epithet for newcomers from Italy.

The spread of nationalistic feelings in the wake of the rise of the Fascist regime to power and dictator Benito Mussolini's implementation of an aggressive foreign policy contributed to solidifying the recent merger of Italian Americans into a single ethnic minority and to strengthening a self-perception that was rooted in attachment to the mother country. Author Albert Peter Russo writes in his autobiography, *Take My Hand*, that

In Italy, Benito Mussolini strutted about basking in the glory of conquests over hapless North African Nations. Strains of the song, "*Faccetta Nera*," bolstered the country's ego, spreading overseas. Thousands of transplanted Italians rejoiced over the lyrics. Vestiges of pride in the land of their birth lingered with them. (132)

This new sense of belonging survived even World War II. As the prewar pro-Fascism feelings in the "Little Italies" had resulted primarily from ethnic pride and defensiveness within a hostile and anti-Italian environment, the military conflict between their ancestral and adoptive countries turned attachment to the *Duce's* government from an asset into a liability in terms of acceptance of Italian Americans by the larger US society as a whole. Against the backdrop of internments, relocations, and "enemy alien" classification in the wake of Pearl Harbor, threats of harassment and fears of falling victims to a witch hunt caused members of the "Little Italies" to overemphasize their allegiance to the United States not to elicit suspicions that they could operate as a pro-Axis fifth column to the benefit of the Fascist regime. This display of patriotism, however, did not necessarily mirror the inner feelings of a large number of Italian Americans toward their ancestral country. Author Gay Talese observes that, even if his own fellow ethnics distanced themselves from Italy in public, they still admired their motherland deep in their hearts. As he puts it,

Not only did they have close relatives and friends living on the other side, but they were also less disenchanted with the *Duce* privately than they pretended to be in public. Mussolini had achieved much in Italy, bringing ethnic pride to Italians throughout the world. (580)

Many members of the “Little Italies” perceived World War II as a fratricide war that pitted their native land against their adoptive country. Pietro Riccobaldi remarked in his autobiography that “to these people the war was not against fascism and nazism, against Mussolini and Hitler, but against Italy, their real motherland” (125). A quotation from Mangione’s *An Ethnic at Large* aptly captures the attitude of the average Italian American: “Italy is my mother and the United States my father and I don’t want to see my parents fighting” (321).

Joseph Vergara shared such worries even if those concerns did not impair his loyalty to Washington at wartime. In a narrative of his youth years, *Love and Pasta*, he remarks that

I wondered how I would react if I was sent to Italy. Could I treat Italians as enemies—men just like il Lungo, the Gink, Compa’ Francesco? Would I be able to pull the trigger if I saw one of Pop’s compa’s through the gun sight? When the time came, I told myself, I would do what I had to. But, all the same, I wondered. (170)

Actually, to those who ended up serving in Italy, it was not an ordinary fight. It was, as the title of Daniel J. Petruzzi’s autobiographical account reads, *My War Against the Land of My Ancestors*.

Italian Americans’ sense of belonging based on their national roots gained momentum during the ethnic revival of the late 1960s and 1970s. This attitude is aptly illustrated by Vincent Panella’s *The Other Side: Growing Up Italian in America*. Published in 1979, this memoir chronicles how a third-generation Italian American moved from being ashamed of his ethnic heritage to an appreciation of his ancestral culture after making a trip in Italy to visit the native village of his grandparents.

At the same time, however, Italian Americans further extended the boundaries of their reference group and developed an identity as white Europeans. Jeanne Schinto observes in *Huddle Fever* that she was proud of being Italian and glad that people asked what her ethnicity was so that she could acknowledge her own heritage. But she was also aware that she “was a member of a much broader human category—white—and where there was only one large ethnic group—African Americans—the question [about her ancestry] would never have been asked of me” (52).

This quotation reveals that Italian Americans’ whiteness was construed in contrast to blacks as the progeny of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century immigrants made its way up the social ladder and perceived African Americans as a threat. Kym Ragusa, the daughter of an Italian man and an African-American woman, describes in *The Skin Between Us* how—notwithstanding the biracial member of the household—her paternal family feared the arrival of black co-residents after they had resettled to suburban New Jersey in a display of social mobility (223).

Antagonism with African American as a key factor in Italian Americans’ re-elaboration of identity in racial terms has been in progress since World War II. Paul Pisicano recalls that

There were riots in Harlem in ‘43. I remember standing on a corner, a guy would throw the door open and say, “Come on down.” They were goin’ to Harlem to get in the riot. They’d say, “Let’s beat up some niggers.” It was wonderful. It was new. The Italo-Americans stopped being Italo and started becoming Americans. We joined the group. Now we’re like you guys, right? (qtd. in Terkel 141-42)

Indeed, as David A. J. Richards argues, Italian Americans became white, namely won full acceptance by and accommodation within US society, only after they began to

share the racist feelings of the WASP establishment toward African Americans. This attitude came to a climax in the 1980s. New York City’s gangs of hoodlums from Italian background beat two African Americans to death in Gravesend in 1982 and in Bensonhurst in 1989. Besides the racial crimes themselves, the insensitivity of most residents in the local Italian neighborhoods to the killings or even their backlash at African Americans’ protest for the murders—as described by Maria Laurino’s *Were You Always an Italian?* (123-24) and Joseph Sciorra’s “‘Italians against Racism’” (193-94, 203)—highlighted Italian Americans’ eventual acquisition of a white identity out of antagonism toward blacks.

Against this backdrop, the extension of Italian Americans’ “circle of the ‘we’” seems to be at odds with a model of ethnic relations that stresses the inclusiveness of US democracy. On the one hand, the shift from a localistic to a national-oriented ethnic sense of belonging before World War II resulted mainly from the anti-Italian intolerance and discrimination that the newcomers and their progeny experienced in their adoptive country. On the other, the whitening of the immigrants’ offspring was part of the acquisition of prejudicial attitudes toward African Americans in the postwar decades. It was the sense of exclusion, not the perception of inclusion, that ignited this process and shaped it in terms of ethnic and racial defensiveness against, respectively, WASP prejudices and African Americans’ claims.

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MARCO MANGANI

“SPEAKING WITH THE HANDS AND EYES”: ELLA FITZGERALD’S  
ART OF SIGNIFYING

With few exceptions, jazz seems to have been a male affair, not without a certain chauvinist connotation (Gabbard qtd. in Minganti *Altre x-roads* 18). Yet, jazz singing is the realm of women. Although several male singers have left significant traces, none of them, aside from Louis Armstrong, can compare to such artists like Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald or Sarah Vaughan. Different as they were, they all succeeded in changing the collateral role of the Swing-era singer into a central one. In the case of Ella, this shift was largely due to her “move ... from club to concert hall, in the wake of the Norman Granz revolution in promoting jazz” (Shipton 663). The most celebrated achievement of such new course was the realization of Ella’s Verve songbooks, “a measuring rod by which all subsequent attempts at the century’s heritage will be assessed” (Green qtd in Shipton 664). For all that, in recording the Verve songbooks, Ella left a considerable part of her jazz art out of the door: her irresistible scat, her skilful variations, as well as her attitude towards quotation and Signifyin(g), are to be looked for elsewhere.

Quotation seems to be one of the main topics in order to understand the complex relationships between originality and imitation in jazz, although it has not always had a good press. Significant, in this regard, is what Gunther Schuller writes about Lionel Hampton:

More disturbing even than the reliance on patterns ... is Hampton’s fatal compulsion for musical quotations. Uncritical audiences, of course, love these diversions, delighted to recognize some snippet from the musical public domain, and enjoying the improviser’s challenge of fitting it into, say, a 2-bar break, a challenge Hampton never fails to meet. The liability of these tactics, however, on a serious level is that they inevitably interrupt the musical argument, rather than extend or develop it. (397)

Times have changed, to be sure, and of the thirteen points that, according to Carl Woideck, summarize Charlie Parker’s style, not least than two are concerned with quotation. According to Krin Gabbard, the author of the most exhaustive essay to date on jazz quotation,

in the hands of the beboppers, the practice became what I call an “avant-garde gesture”, not unlike disruptions of classical art in the European vanguard movements of the early twentieth century. Like their predecessors in this “historical avant garde”, boppers used quotation to undermine distinctions between high and low art and to question the “aura” that in the minds of most listeners surrounds the work of composers like Percy Grainger but not the improvisations of a black saxophone player. In addition, the quoting bop artist creates the effect of a collage, something that Peter Bürger has called a “fundamental principle of avantgardiste art.” (93)

In the same article, Gabbard outlines a clean borderline between quotation as disruption—a typical modern jazz practice—and quotation as entertainment—a trait of the previous stylistic era (Armstrong being, of course, a case in point). At the same time, he must admit that disruption might not always be at stake with the boppers' art of quotation. Charlie Parker, for instance, “could ... have been of two minds about his relationship to the music of white and/or ‘high’ culture”, since he “genuinely admired Honegger, Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Varèse” (104).

The fact is that, as far as quotation is concerned, the boundary between respect and irony is often extremely blurred. It is doubtful, for instance, that Duke Ellington's quotation of Chopin's *Marche funèbre* at the very end of his *Black and Tan Fantasy* may be dismissed as “classicistic,” as Gabbard does: “Although there is a playfulness to this kind of quotation, it is not unlike similar gestures by “European” composers such as Ives, Mahler, and Liszt ... these composers can still be considered classicists” (102-3). When considered in the light of the Harlem Renaissance debate and within the context of the movie *Black and Tan*, directed by Dudley Murphy in 1929, this quotation assumes far more complex and multifaceted contours (Metzer 24-25).<sup>1</sup>

Following David Metzer, we can here take into account the concept of Signifyin(g) as defined by Henry Louis Gates in his groundbreaking study on African-American literary tradition, *The Signifying Monkey*; a concept which, with all its shortcomings, seems to offer the best interpretive context for the phenomenon of quotation in jazz performance. Actually, as Gates himself has pointed out, Signifyin(g) plays an important role in the art of jazz musicians, as is the case with Count Basie and Oscar Peterson (63-4, 104-5, 123).

Scholars have already called attention to Ella's attitude towards quotation as a means of constructing sense within jazz performance (Nicholson, 2004; Cartwright, 2008). Generally speaking, we can say that during a performance Ella could signify upon at least three categories of subjects: 1) a well-known melody of any provenance (classic, popular, or even rock), but external to the performed song, whose main requested quality was that of being immediately recognizable on the part of the audience; 2) a celebrated jazz musician (Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, among others), identified through a musical gesture created, or usually employed, by him or her; 3) an artist who was taking part in that very same performance. As for the means through which Ella used to signify, melodic quotation was but one. In this regard, we can recall Roger D. Abrahams' definition of signifying, according to which this term can refer to “any of a number of things”; in particular, “it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes,” so that “it is signifying to make fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back” (qtd. in Gates 54).

Ella's 1947 performance of *How High The Moon*, realized at the Carnegie Hall together with Dizzy Gillespie and his band, offers a typical example of her art of imitating (and mocking) the musical gestures of a colleague.<sup>2</sup>

However, in order to get a more complete picture of her mimetic art, we must have recourse to videos, since the movements she usually accomplished while imitating an instrument player on the spot represent an embodied component inseparable from the whole performance. A clear example of such an embodiment is offered by a short

<sup>1</sup> On Murphy's movie in the context of the relationship between jazz and cinema, see also Minganti 19-32; 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> CD *Ella Fitzgerald – Quintessence. New York 1936-1948*, Frémeaux & Associés FA 232, c. 2006. I have proposed an analysis of this performance in my article “Dal musical ai Beatles e ritorno.”

melodic gesture that Ella usually introduced into her scat improvisations on *How High the Moon*.<sup>3</sup> In a video that reproduces a live performance of *Air Mail Special*, Ella, sided by bassist Ray Brown (her husband from 1947 to 1953), guitarist Herb Ellis and drummer Jo Jones, introduces a virtually identical musical trait, at the same time imitating with her hands the typical movements of a bowed bass player, which Brown promptly replicates.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most meaningful example of Ella’s attitude towards Signifyin(g) through “speaking with the hands and eyes,” however, is attested by the so-called “perfect match” (in Nat Hentoff’s words), that is, the concert given by the singer at the Montreux jazz festival in 1979 together with the Count Basie orchestra.<sup>5</sup> The piece in question is a long improvisation on the blues changes, named “B & E (Basella),” consisting of a succession of three duets, with Basie (featured only for this piece), tenorist Eric Dixon and trombonist Mitchell “Booty” Wood, respectively; all performers then reunite for an exciting coda. The duet with Booty is certainly the most well-balanced: three choruses of the solo trombone are followed by four choruses where the two alternate. This second section (choruses nr. 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the duet) has a stichomythic character: each soloist takes a single phrase of the blues structure in turn, immediately leaving the next phrase to the other one. Since the blues structure foresees three phrases, each chorus is opened by a different soloist, according to the following scheme (B = Booty; E = Ella; the choruses’ numbering refers to this duet, not to the piece as a whole):

Table 1

	phrase 1	phrase 2	phrase 3
chorus 4	B	E	B
chorus 5	E	B	E
chorus 6	B	E	B
chorus 7	E	B	E

The most interesting consequence of this asymmetrical disposition is the reversal of the proposal/imitation relationship between the two performers in chorus nr. 5, while the last chorus of the duet opens with Ella imitating Booty’s previous phrase, thus disrupting the borderline between choruses nr. 6 and 7.

Table 2

	phrase 1	phrase 2	phrase 3
chorus 4:	<b>B</b> proposes a “jungle style” solo, characterized by the presence of the “wa-	<b>E</b> <i>imitates the “wa-wa” effect</i> , but proposes a new melodic line	<b>B</b> closes in the same mood

<sup>3</sup> This gesture can be heard at c.ca 5’26” of the celebrated Berlin performance of that piece: CD *Mack The Knife. The Complete Ella in Berlin*, Verve 519 564-2, c.1993.

<sup>4</sup> The video can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wx-0h3eEr3E>. The gesture in question is at c.ca 3’05”.

<sup>5</sup> DVD *Norman Granz’ Jazz in Montreux presents: Ella & Basie. “The Perfect Match” ’79*, Laser Swing Productions, c. 2004.

	phrase 1	phrase 2	phrase 3
	wa" mute		
chorus 5:	<b>E</b> proposes a trombone- like solo with a rising glissando	<b>B</b> <i>imitates E's trombone- like solo (glissando and all)</i>	<b>E</b> proposes a new closure, whose <i>beginning imitates the last melodic gesture of B's last phrase</i>
chorus 6:	<b>B</b> proposes an elephant- like trumpeting	<b>E</b> <i>imitates the trumpeting</i>	<b>B</b> closes with a variation of the trumpeting
chorus 7:	<b>E</b> <i>imitates B's last closure</i>	<b>B</b> goes back to the "wa- wa" sound of the beginning, then ostentatiously turns his head away	<b>E</b> <i>closes with a steady "wa-wa" call, drawing B's attention to the imminent coda</i>

Italics indicate that a performer is imitating something previously proposed by the other one; dashed borders indicate that some common musical elements subsist between two consecutive sections, the absence of any border indicates a strong musical continuity.

As defined by Gates, Signifyin(g) can be "motivated" or "unmotivated," the latter adjective suggesting "not the absence of a profound intention, but the absence of a negative critique" (xxvi). Referring to the founding myth of the monkey that dupes the lion by signifyin(g),<sup>6</sup> Gates defines "motivated" Signifyin(g) as follows: "Motivated Signifyin(g) is the sort in which the Monkey delights; it functions to redress an imbalance of power, to clear a space, rhetorically" (124).

If we consider the reversal of the proposal/imitation relationship that takes place in chorus nr 5 of the Ella & Booty duet, then it becomes clear that Ella could manage the jazz improvisation tradition to the point that she could suggest musical solutions to the instrument players. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that during the "perfect match" she was actually the very first to propose a jungle-style trombone solo, namely in her performance of *After You've Gone*. While lack of respect and liking is here out of question, it seems to me that Ella's Signifyin(g) upon instruments possesses a strong motivated character that "functions to redress an imbalance of power"—the imbalance between men and women in jazz. The singer's mix of liking and irony, complicity and distance, together with her supreme technical skill, create a unique art event, which can fully be appreciated only by also considering the visual implications of her embodied performance; an event always successful in its aim to challenge the supposed male superiority in the field of jazz improvisation.

<sup>6</sup> On some occurrences of the myth in African-American culture see also Minganti 32-39.

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LISA MARCHI

MAPPING DEMOCRACY AND DISSENT IN ARAB-AMERICAN POETRY

In “Creativity, Dissidence, and Women,” Egyptian feminist, activist, and scholar Nawal al-Saadawi explains that dissent and creativity are tightly interrelated and that creativity plays a crucial role in fighting social injustice and challenging power. This is particularly true in the case of Arab-American poets Naomi Shihab Nye and Suheir Hammad, who use their creativity to denounce the abuses of state power and counterbalance the dominant reductions of Arabness and Islam as the embodiment of evil and threat after 9/11. Writing in the aftermath of 9/11 means being confronted with the difficult task of opposing stereotyped representations of the Arab and Arab-American identity, and fighting the increasing hostility against Arabness and Islam in the American society. Indeed, as Shu-Mei Shih rightly notes: “When the time is post-9/11 and the place is the US, we see the rise of Islamophobia, a not-so-new but newly racialized racism” (1357). As Shih powerfully argues, since 9/11, Arabness and especially Islam have come to embody Otherness and threat.

The deliberately created association between Islam/Arabness and evil is clearly not a new phenomenon but rather the final development of a historical process during which Arabs have been discursively constructed as Others. According to Edward Said, Orientalism itself was “a mode of discourse” (*Orientalism* 2) “based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’” (2); this discourse, as Said impeccably demonstrates, was produced by different power institutions with the aim of “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Michele Foucault’s conceptualization of *discursive formation*, as a systematic knowledge through which power exerts its authority on the subject that it contributes to construct, is particularly useful to understand the challenge that Arab-American writers face today.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas until recently, racism in the US has been largely constructed within a white/non-white paradigm,<sup>2</sup> today racialized discourses tend to develop around the construction of Arabness and Islam as markers of an intrinsic and therefore essential “difference” from whiteness. Racism based on ‘color’ has thus been gradually replaced

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview on the stereotypes diffused by the media and Hollywood film industry, see Shaheen 2001, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Race has been a crucial category of difference for Arab immigrants arriving in the US, who were intermittently constructed and perceived as white or not enough white and whose position consequently shifted from being recognized as full citizens to being marginalized and refused naturalization. On the ambiguous racial status of Arabs in the US, see Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White. Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2009. Consider, in particular, the second section “Claiming Whiteness” and the fourth section “The Lynching of Nola Romey.”

by a so-called ‘cultural racism.’<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as Joanna Kadi rightly notes, in times of crisis and war, such as the oil embargo of 1972, the Iran Revolution in 1979, and the Gulf war in 1991, Arabs have been constructed “as a distinct racial group” (xvi). This is also the case of the crisis engendered by 9/11, a period during which Arabs have come “from being considered white or almost white to being ‘colored’” (Shih 1357). The “changed political atmosphere” that followed the attack to the Twin Towers gave rise to an intensification of the hostility against Arabs, “a much more aggressive American attitude towards the world, and ... a much exacerbated conflict between what have been called ‘the West’ and ‘Islam’” (Said, *Humanism* xvi). The Patriotic Act, in particular, supporting “indefinite detention; searches, seizures and wiretapping, and guilt by association” (Orfalea 312) contributed to raise a sense of persecution among Arab-Americans who felt once again stigmatized and marginalized. The increasing hatred against Arabs and Muslims reached a point of non-return with the circulation of photos witnessing the torture and humiliation carried out by US soldiers on Arab prisoners in Abu Ghaib and Guantanamo. These photos declared to the world the failure of the American “civilizing mission,” the dangers embedded in the American theorization of a “state of exception,” and the necessity to urgently rethink America’s democracy in terms of empathy, shared humanity, ethics.<sup>4</sup>

Arab-American poets Nye and Hammad intervene in this debate, by providing an uncompromising critique of America’s war on terror and by denouncing the terrible consequences of the so-called “civilizing mission” that the US were carrying out in the Middle East. In “He said EYE-RACK” (2008), Nye expresses a harsh critique against America’s foreign and imperialistic policy and openly condemns the American invasion of Iraq. The poet sarcastically ridicules America’s “civilizing mission” and shows that the war against Iraq is not innocent and harmless but implies the use of a devastating force causing destructions and deaths:

Relative to our plans for your country,  
we will blast your tree, crush your cart,  
stun your grocery.  
Amen sisters and brothers,  
Give us your sesame legs,  
your satchels, your skies.  
Freedom will feel good  
to you too. Please acknowledge  
our higher purpose. No, we did not see  
your bed of parsley.

In this poem, Nye reverses Bush’s construction of Iraq as a rogue state and shows how, in the name of “a higher purpose,” the US themselves have become a threatening

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<sup>3</sup> A similar development can also be seen in Britain where the Arab-Muslim minority has been racialized in terms of cultural difference. See Max Silverman and Nira Juval-Davis, “Jews, Arabs and the theorization of racism in Britain” (25-39).

<sup>4</sup> See on the specific regard of photos, Judith Butler “Sexual politics, torture, and secular time.” *The British Journal of Sociology* 59.1 (2008): 1-23. In her thought-provoking article, Butler interprets the “barbarism” of these coercive practices as “the barbarism of the civilizational mission” and sees the necessity of articulating a “counter-imperialist politics, especially a feminist and queer one” (19) to fight state violence and its abuses. Butler concludes by invoking a new conceptualization of freedom that rejects coercive state power and recognizes instead “the already existing alliances and sites of contact, however antagonistic, with other minorities” (21).

power that disregards human life and turns blind eye to the sufferings of the civil population. Nye dissents here on the instrumental use of fundamental rights, such as freedom and democracy, to justify the invasion of Iraq. Freedom, in particular, is outlined here in contradictory terms: rather than being represented as a right that people are legally entitled to have, the poet constructs it as an exclusivist possession that only certain countries own and can decide to unilaterally and compassionately hand down on “less civilized” and “less democratic” populations. Nye’s critique against what she considers America’s fake and well advertised humanitarianism is further emphasized through the representation of Bush as a tactless, stiff, and aggressive despot. By drawing a sombre portrait of the former US President, Nye highlights his insensitivity, roughness, and belligerence. While reading these lines, the reader cannot but dissociate from Bush and disagree with his pitiless generalizations:

On St Patrick’s Day  
 2003, President Bush wore a blue tie. Blinking hard,  
 he said, ‘We are not dealing with peaceful men.’  
 He said, ‘reckless aggression.’  
 He said, ‘the danger is clear.’  
 .....  
 He said, ‘We are  
 against the lawless men who  
 rule your country, not you.’ Tell that  
 to the mother, the sister, the bride,  
 the proud boy, the peanut-seller,  
 the librarian careful with her shelves. (142)

Nye opposes here the cultural reductions circulated by the Bush administration to justify the war on terror and the invasion of Iraq. Whereas Bush constructs Iraqis (and Arabs more in general) in abstract terms, as harmful, dangerous and aggressive men, Nye turns to the concrete everyday life of Iraqis and provides readers with an alternative representation that allows them to recognize Arabs as human beings and therefore people they can identify with. The Arabs mentioned by Nye are concrete and ordinary people who are, quoting Judith Butler, “worth valuing” and whose lives “are worth safeguarding, protecting ... precarious, and worth public grieving as well” (“Sexual Politics” 15). In contrast to the state propaganda that de-humanizes Arabs in order to justify the war on terror, Nye draws the reader’s attention to the everyday life of Iraqi men and women and unsettles the dominant misrepresentations with a new cartography of creative images that foregrounds the humanity of Arabs and therefore their affinity with us.<sup>5</sup> By providing us with a humanizing framework, Nye promotes human connectivity and enables empathy. This is clearly not an innocent or innocuous gesture but rather a form of civil disobedience through which the poet expresses her dissent on the US foreign policy and its subsequent power abuses. This interpretation is confirmed by Samina Najmi who observes: “For Nye, precise, concrete language—that is, language committed to realities on a small, measurable scale—is a matter of both poetics and politics” (160).

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<sup>5</sup> This poetic gesture, as Catherine Wagner underlines, is not free of contradictions. Nye’s inclination to depict Arabs as entirely loving and perfect, Nye risks the danger of replicating the opposition good vs. evil that she wishes to subvert. On the limits of Nye’s a-critical representation of Arabs, see Catherine Wagner’s review “19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East by Naomi Shihab Nye; *E-mails from Scheherazad* by Mohja Kahf” in *MELUS* 31.4 (Winter 2006): 235-241.

Like Nye, Palestinian-American poet Suheir Hammad takes a “politically defiant posture” (Najmi 158) towards US foreign policy, and subverts the dominant misrepresentations of the Arab and Arab-American identity as the symbol of evil. Hammad’s uncompromising critique of US state violence is particularly evident in *Zaatar Diva* (2005), a collection in which the poet interweaves personal, political and figurative dimensions and addresses crucial issues such as the iniquity of state violence, the celebration of her hyphenated identity, the traumatic events and brutality unfolding in Palestine. The Arab term “Zaatar,” that gives the name to the collection and indicates a typical Middle Eastern spice mixture, is a clear anticipation of what the reader will encounter in this book: a collection of spicy and passionate poems. Hammad’s writing is indeed simultaneously lyrical and belligerent, compassionate and critical. This doubleness is particularly evident in the poem “What I will” (60-61), where Hammad openly dissociates herself from the US’s imperialistic agenda and refuses to take part in the American triumphalistic celebration of the war on terror:

I will not  
 dance to your war  
 drum. I will  
 not lend my soul nor  
 my bones to your war  
 drum. I will  
 not dance to your  
 beating. I know that beat.  
 It is lifeless. I know  
 intimately that skin you are hitting. (60)

In this poem, Hammad distances herself from Americans’ blind support to the war on terror and declares her disloyalty to a hypocrite nation that pretends to be ‘good’ and democratic but is in fact spreading destruction and death. Hammad compares war to an unpleasant and disturbing dance in which Americans lightly and quickly take part but in which she refuses to participate. The reference to the drum and its sombre and unstoppable beating conveys feelings of fear and unease and contributes to construct an atmosphere of disorder and impending disaster. Hammad constructs here the continuous beating sound of the war propaganda in opposition to the “humming” of an intimate circle of people that she decides to join to celebrate life. Hammad appears here to embody a particular type of intellectual, the one so powerfully described by Said as “a kind of counter-memory, with its own discourse that will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep” (*Humanism* 142). Hammad refuses to listen to and take part in the hysterical dance (and war) carried out by a dazed nation and invalidates the state’s apologia of war, by reaffirming instead life as “a right / not collateral or casual” (60). The poet wishes to heal a wounded nation hardened by a harsh state rhetoric supporting the war on terror, and in order to do this, she zooms in on the everyday life of the victims of the war, by providing the reader with a close-up picture of the concrete damages of the war and by reaffirming her alliance to that vulnerable “skin” being hit.

In *Zaatar Diva*, Hammad uses her poetry not only to oppose America’s war on terror and shake the conscience of her fellow citizens, but also to fight the dominant cultural reduction of Arabs and Arab-Americans as a threat to national security. This critique is clearly expressed in “mike check” (62-63), a poem in which Hammad expresses her disagreement with the institutionalization of racist practices after 9/11. As Thery Alyce Pickens observes, this is a complex and multi-layered poem in which “Hammad blends

the art of emcee-ing (one of the four main elements of hip-hop culture), with the typical language of a sound check and her experience of being racially profiled in, presumably, an American airport” (08). The poem, in fact, stages a sort of spoken-word competition between a supposedly Arab-American citizen going through airport check, and Mike, the American airport officer who is checking her bag. The two contenders are described in antithetical terms: Mike is blonde, wears a cross, and looks harmless; the speaker, on the contrary, is affiliated with “folks” who “murdered ... as they prayed” (63) and therefore with ‘evil’. What initially looks like a normal routine check turns out to be a security procedure based on racial profiling. As the speaker soon realizes, her bag is not checked in “a random / routine check” (62), but is the object of a discriminatory practice.

In “mike check,” Hammad expresses a harsh critique against the racist assumptions lurking in post-9/11 US national security procedures and launches an attack to the American nation that pretends to be fully inclusive and democratic but carries out racist practices against Muslims and Arabs. The opening lines “one two one two can you / hear me mic check one two” (62) are not just a sound check but a strategy through which the speaker attempts to establish a relation with her interlocutor and expresses her sense of impotence in the face of a cultural racism that clearly dis-empowers her. This sense of vulnerability and persecution is further conveyed through the hasty and agitated words that the speaker directs to her interlocutor in a confused and disoriented way: “mic check yes i / packed my own / bag can you hear / me no they have not / been out of my possession” (63). In “mike check,” Hammad represents an unbalanced and potentially explosive relation and reproduces in poetic terms the feelings of fear and sense of treason experienced by Arab-Americans after 9/11. She further expresses the “anger” and “agony” of Arab-Americans and especially their deep “fear of being mistaken” (Orfalea 299) as fanatical Muslims and potential terrorists.

As I have intended to demonstrate, in “mike check” Hammad mirrors the increasing hatred, anxiety, and public hysteria corrupting America’s democracy after 9/11, and puts us on guard against the power abuses carried out under the flag of America’s “state of exception”. On this regard, the final question that the speaker directs to the US officer and that closes the poem raises uncomfortable questions, by highlighting the dangerous and authoritarian drift that America’s democracy has taken after 9/11. The question, “a-yo mike / whose gonna check you?” (63), is a clear challenge to the authority of the US officer checking her bag and an act of civil resistance through which the speaker puts mike as well as America’s apparently exemplary and moral behaviour in question. The speaker skilfully overturns the hatred and distrust that have been directed towards her: first, she refuses to be accommodating and complicit with power; then, she advances the idea that evil may be hiding there where we do not expect to find it. By and large, Hammad subverts in this poem the negative polarities officer vs. potential terrorist, American vs. Arab, Christian vs. Muslim, good vs. evil, completely altering the point of view from which we see the scene. She further complicates the simplistic association Arab/potential terrorist, Islam/evil by mixing literature and performance, creativity and dissent, thereby demonstrating that spoken word poetry has the power to detect and denounce the flaws of an all-too good and complacent American democracy.

Thus, I have intended to show that, both Nye and Hammad use their creativity to fight and neutralize the dominant representation of Arabness and Islam as the embodiment of evil. Far from reconfirming the uniform, simplistic, and abstract

representations diffused by power, the writers at the centre of this study turn to the rich everyday life of Arab and Arab-American subjectivities to stress their humanity and promote intercultural understanding. In line with Nouri Gana, I have argued that Arab-Americans use their art to invalidate “the inimical image of Islam and Arabness as well as the continual violence of which it is simultaneously the target and the product” (“Introduction” 1573). Moreover, I have also intended to show that Nye and Hammad’s poetic and political gesture is not simply reactive to a state of things pre-existing their poetry, but rather proactive in the sense that it shows the limits of an all too self-satisfied approach to American democracy. Indeed, I claim that their works urge us to rethink and re-articulate America’s democracy in a more radical, and therefore more responsible and inclusive way along the lines indicated by the New Americanists. Nye and Hammad fully participate in the effort to produce a frame of ongoing critical thinking that is hospitable to an ever growing number of diversities and transnational relations.

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ELISABETTA MARINO

TEACHING DIFFERENCE IN DEMOCRATIC AMERICA:  
MARIA MAZZIOTTI GILLAN AS A POET AND EDITOR

Born in Paterson (New Jersey), in 1940, to parents originating from the surroundings of Salerno, Maria Mazziotti Gillan is an exuberant, multifaceted and versatile intellectual: she is the Founder and Director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College in Paterson and the Director of the Creative Writing Program at Binghamton University, State University of New York. She has published ten collections of poetry and, together with her daughter Jennifer, she has co-edited three anthologies, featuring authors of different ethnic origins. Besides, she is the editor of the multi award-winning *Paterson Literary Review*, a literary magazine established in 1979 to showcase the work of prominent as well as less renowned writers from the US and abroad.

What joins together the seemingly heterogeneous threads of her unique talent is her deep commitment to enhancing the society she belongs to, by teaching that, in a truly democratic America, difference should be regarded as an asset, as a positively enriching factor. Her forceful intention to rebel against previously accepted, superimposed and standardizing models, the rediscovery and proud assertion of her heritage, and the “cult for the family bond” expressed in her poems—to quote Lina Unali, who refers to the overwhelming, almost provocative presence of family figures in the works of many Italian American writers (74)—may be considered as the necessary steps to pursue a much broader goal than the definition of her personal identity as an Italian American. In fact, once Maria Mazziotti Gillan has accomplished her search for a usable past, she actually donates the fruit of her quest to the wider community: through her poems she passes on her vigorous testimony of endurance, her strategies for survival and empowerment, and she teaches how to acknowledge and then heal the wounds of personal and collective history. As she pointed out in a recent interview, “I’m trying to write about what it means to be human, and I hope that subject matter transcends social class[,] gender” (Dougherty 21) and, one might be tempted to add, cultural background. Even her activity as an editor and her partnership with authors that have experienced parallel feelings of imbalance and alienation, followed by similar attempts at conformity and then release from it, somehow stem from her will to share her past and family life. Maria’s mother used to prepare food for the whole neighborhood: “the more I gave away, the more I had to give” (Dougherty 24), she would say. “Giving away poetry, creating connections between poets, editing a magazine and anthologies,” Maria Mazziotti Gillan further elucidates “has been a way for me to follow my mother’s example. I founded the poetry center in Paterson in 1980 and feel that by creating a space for poets and for their voices and their work, my own work has gotten stronger” (Dougherty 25). Maria also recalls her father’s utmost dedication to his family and to

the larger community as well: through his constantly helpful attitude and his self-abnegation “I learned,” as the poet underlines, “that we have a responsibility not only to ourselves but also to the world” (Dougherty 13). This profound awareness of one’s duty towards society, the idea that *democracy* necessarily implies individual participation, permeates all her writings and is infused in her editorial activity.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First of all, it will follow the path of Maria Mazziotti Gillan’s poetic career as featured in her latest, comprehensive volume entitled *What We Pass on. Collected Poems 1980-2009*, published in 2010. Then it will focus on the way her message has been reiterated, almost doubled, and certainly strengthened by entwining her experience with that of other non-WASP writers; three anthologies, namely *Unsettling America, an Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry*, *Growing up Ethnic in America, Contemporary Fiction about Learning to Be American*, and *Identity Lessons, Contemporary Writing about Learning to Be American* will be taken into consideration.

### *What We Pass on*

From the very choice of the title, *What We Pass on* highlights the concept of a productive continuity from past to future. The volume includes all the poems featured in the four poetry collections that Maria Mazziotti Gillan has devoted to the search for her Italian American identity, and ends with a section entitled “New Poems,” which meaningfully portrays the ultimate results of her poetic journey. The first stage of her progress could be called denial, and well embodies the dangerous cultural amnesia that affected many Italian Americans until more recent years. As Maria recalls, “I didn’t write about my family, except for one poem about my father and another about my mother until I was forty years old” (Dougherty 15). As a child, her origin had to be kept concealed, shrouded in silence, for fear of being stigmatized, labeled as a “Dago, Guinea, Wop, Gangster, / Garlic Eater, Mafioso” (“Columbus and the Road to Glory” 85), some of the most recurrent derogatory terms used to single out faces displaying a different (not to say the wrong) shade of white. “*Stà [sic] zitta, Don’t make trouble! Non far mala figura*” (87) was her mother’s constant warning. Words “smooth in [her] mouth” (“Public School No. 18, Paterson, New Jersey” 20), when she was expressing herself in Italian in the reassuring home environment, got stuck in her throat at school, where English was the only language allowed; as she wrote in “Growing up Italian,” “in kindergarten, English words fell on me, / thick and sharp as hail. I grew silent” (60). Being herself an educator, Maria Mazziotti Gillan cannot refrain from casting light on the responsibility of several teachers who, instead of building bridges and spreading the value of cultural pluralism as inextricably linked with the idea of democracy, contributed, with their ignorance and insensitive behavior, to thicken the imperceptible walls isolating the Italian American child. Just to quote a few examples, “Mr. Landgraf called Joey/a ‘spaghetti bender’” (“Growing up Italian” 62); Miss Wilson once dragged Maria to the window of her classroom and insisted on checking her hair for lice, in order to protect the other pupils from contagion (see Public School No. 18, Paterson, New Jersey). Miss Barton, with her “icy eyes” used to terrify Maria, who tried to be invisible, “to be quiet ‘as a mouse’”, humiliated by the blond curls and the blue eyes, by the “big, white house with its huge lawn of manicured grass” (“Learning Silence” 143), by the all-American glossy perfection on display in the *Dick and Jane* books, used in

those days to teach American children how to read. Denial also implies a series of attempts at erasing her own Italianness. Apart from chronicling her vain efforts to tame her wild, dark ringlets, Maria's poems record the way she strove to transform her father Arturo, "silk worker,/janitor,/night watchman,/immigrant Italian" ("Daddy We Called You" 213) into Arthur, "daddy," the *Father Knows Best* TV character;<sup>1</sup> out of sheer mimicry in "Arturo," she became "Marie," and began to deliberately fill her head with fake, Doris Day dreams, symptomatic of her urge to blend in. About the time she turned 40, however, realization hit her like a slap in her face, and she eventually decided to courageously break the silence she had been condemned to, up until that moment. Her acute but repressed pain melted into a significant 'song of herself.' Thus interpreting the democratic ideals voiced by Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*, she began to celebrate herself, as well as all those who, like her, had been prevented from claiming America. She wrote in "Growing up Italian":

...I celebrate  
 My Italian American self,  
 Rooted in this, my country, where  
 All those black/brown/red/yellow  
 Olive-skinned people  
 Soon will raise their voices  
 And sing this new anthem:

Here I am  
 And I am strong  
 And my skin is warm in the sun  
 And my dark hair shines,

And today, I take back my name  
 And wave it in their faces  
 Like a bright, red flag. ("Growing up Italian" 64)

The second stage of Maria Mazziotti Gillan's journey in *What We Pass on* is focused on her firm intention to recover what had been lost or hidden, and to rebuild a new life from it, for the sake of both herself and the others. As Sean Dougherty has remarked, Maria is a true "metaphysician of the household" (15): a large number of her lines are actually dedicated to her ancestors, to her mother, father, sister and the tight, nurturing, empowering connection existing among them. In the poem entitled "Magic Circle," Maria's mother is portrayed while symbolically drawing "her magic circle around us/lead[ing] us inside/where we are always safe" (241). In "Song for Caroline," the family gathers around the new-born baby girl (the poet's grand-daughter), "in a circle around you,/as if you were a fire and we, needing/your warmth against the chill" (96). Images of circularity are recurrent throughout the volume. In "Learning Grace," "My Mother Gave Me Her Ring," "The Cup," and "The Onion," the poet mentions bread, rings, eggs, cups, onions (with their different layers protecting the core), and round "peasant Russian dolls" she identifies with: "when you open me up my mother, her mother, my daughter, my son's daughter" ("Heritage" 112). Nonetheless, her family, compared in "Seventeenth Street: Paterson, New Jersey" (her childhood address) to a "luminous circle of love" (75), should not be perceived as a defensive shell; it is rather a radiating center that suffuses the whole society with its healing energy. It is not

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<sup>1</sup> Compare the poem entitled "Daddy, We Called You."

surprising, therefore, that Maria, in “What I Remember,” metaphorically takes her ailing husband, affected by Parkinson’s disease, back to her Seventeenth Street kitchen, pulling him into the memory of a place “so filled / with soft light and arms that held me”:

My father could stir an egg for you  
in a cup. My mother break off a piece of hot bread for you [...]  
We could leave all our grief in a sack by the door. (Mazziotti Gillan 396)

“What We Pass on” is also the title of one of the final poems of the collection, where the uninterrupted thread joining generations is meaningfully woven with the fabric of the broader community. Like his father, Maria’s son never gives up; like her, he “needs to heal the world,/needs to be responsible for everyone” (412). Serious concerns for the centrifugal tendencies in modern society surface in the poem entitled “Playing with Dolls,” where the solitary leisure time occupations of her grandchildren are contrasted with the simpler but certainly more cheerful games she used to play in her old kitchen, using empty M&M’s boxes, magically transformed into cars in her imagination. “How did we get so much and lose everything?” (433), she wonders, thus prompting her readers to look back, and draw vitalizing nourishment from their roots. In the concluding section of her volume, Maria Mazziotti Gillan even shows her active commitment to the environmental cause, as in the poem “The Polar Bears are Drowning,” delving into the destructive impact of global warming. The importance attached to what we transmit to posterity is once more reiterated: “The world I grew up in is gone and what we pass on to our / children and grandchildren will be so much less than what we were given, and only our greed and desire to blame” (430).

### *The Anthologies*

The three previous anthologies seem to reproduce the same itinerary outlined in *What We Pass on*. Besides, the bond between the two branches of Maria Mazziotti Gillan’s literary activity (as a poet and as an editor) is all the more evident in the dedicatory words of the volumes, recalling the pivotal traits of her poetry: *Unsettling America* (published in 1994) is dedicated to her mother, Angelina Schiavo Mazziotti, with the following accompanying words: “soothsayer, healer, tale-teller, there was nothing you could not do” (i), a quotation from “Ma Who Told Me You Forgot how to Cry;” *Growing up Ethnic in America* (published in 1999) was written in the loving memory of her father, Arturo Mazziotti; finally, *Identity Lessons* (also published in 1999) is a token of gratitude to “Teachers who taught us to believe in ourselves” (x).

When asked what triggered the publication of anthologies, Maria Mazziotti Gillan replied:

As a child and when I was growing up, I really believed in the narrative of a democratic America that offered equal opportunities to all. For a long time, I accepted this idea, but the more I read the works by people from various ethnic groups, the more the idea was called into question for me. What Jennifer and I tried to do through our anthologies was to make the literary canon more inclusive and to have the work of people from different backgrounds speak to one another. The organization of the anthologies was very important as it was thematic and it became a kind of conversation about inclusion and exclusion between writers. Prior to our work, anthologies tended to feature one or possibly two African American poets and one Hispanic poet. Among others, we involved Native Americans, Italian Americans, Arab Americans,

Jewish Americans, and it became a widening circle, as other editors started to pay attention to the sheer variety of work by all these people. In my activities, I have always emphasized the way diversity and immigrant populations have made America stronger and more vibrant. (email interview)

What follows is Jennifer Gillan's comment:

Our work in the anthologies was intended to illuminate the dislocation and distortion that can accompany growing up ethnic in America. We wanted to challenge those images so that the next generation can grow up secure in the knowledge that there are many shapes and shades of American faces, many ways to be American. We attempted to encourage our readers to value the experience of ethnic America, to confront the significance of the ways that race and ethnicity have shaped the identity of our nation. (email interview)

The first collection aims at dismantling what Jennifer Gillan describes in her "Introduction" as the "mythic scenes [that] have become frozen into tableaux of American Identity" (*Unsettling America* xix), namely the blessed arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in the New World, or the image of the brave, democratic soldiers fighting to release the colonies from the shackles of the British domination. By joining forces with so many other writers of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Indian, Mexican and Caribbean descent (just to name a few), Maria and Jennifer, mother and daughter, wish to suggest to their readers that there is not just one American history, but many, equally valuable histories that deserve to be uncovered, acknowledged and shared with the mainstream society. In striking resemblance to the development of the poet's output, the poems featured in the volume are grouped in consecutive stages (corresponding to consecutive sections in the volume): "Uprooting," "Performing," "Negotiating," "Re-envisioning." In each of them, authors from different backgrounds appear to be engaged in a cross-cultural dialogue, bearing witness to their similar struggles and life experiences. *Growing up Ethnic in America* completes what the two editors had begun in *Unsettling America*, this time offering a selection of prose pieces, which effectively demonstrate that diversity "is the source of the nation's great discord and its infinite promise" (*Growing up* x).

The last volume, *Identity Lessons, Contemporary Writing about Learning to be American*, somehow succeeds in healing the emotional and moral wounds inflicted to Maria and many other children of ethnic origin by their unsympathetic and prejudiced teachers. The anthology is mainly focused on school experiences, even though the lessons learned at home and the parent-child relationships are also dealt with. From being the site where each student is confronted with the hard decision of choosing sides, where he/she is requested to switch linguistic and behavioral codes and pledge a definitive allegiance to a nation that seemingly views democracy and difference as clashing concepts, the school environment can also be the place where the pupils' potential is forcefully enhanced. "Education," as Jennifer Gillan points out, "can open our minds to new experiences and new ways of thinking, and introduce us to lifelong friends and inspiring role models" (*Identity Lessons* xiv). It is not by chance, then, that the final section of the volume is entitled "Beyond *Dick and Jane*"; it is not by chance that it bears an epigraph from Maria Mazziotti Gillan's poem entitled "Public School No 18, Paterson, New Jersey":

I am proud of my mother  
All dressed in black  
Proud of my father

With his broken tongue,  
 Proud of the laughter  
 And the noise of our house. (309)

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MENA MITRANO

PHOTOGRAPHY AND DISSENT: SUSAN SONTAG

When speaking of the conjunction proposed by our panel, Democracy and Dissent, one of the first things that comes to mind is Edward Said's portrait of the public intellectual. According to Said, the intellectual is "a member of a small, embattled, morally driven group speaking out against prevailing opinions regardless of the consequences to themselves," a being "set apart, someone able to speak the truth to power, a crusty, eloquent, fantastically courageous and angry individual for whom no worldly power is too big and imposing to be criticized and pointedly taken to task" (qtd. in Makdisi 22). Said's intellectual is first and foremost someone who "visibly represents" the speaking subject in our culture (Said 12), someone who speaks to and for the many. As independent and noble as this figure might be, s/he requires a scene of utterance in which the main function of speech is to bind people into crowds. But this scene of utterance has come under attack because on the ground that it can translate dissent into rites of assent. Aware of the risk, Julia Kristeva has responded to Said's portrait with her own revision.

Rather than emphasize the "vocation for the art of representing," Kristeva defends the "dissident function" of the intellectual (294). In the wake of political extremism and/or fanaticism, Kristeva understands the dissident function in terms of an "analytical position," as a critical capacity aimed at the symbolic substratum of the national culture, at the folds of common sense (Kristeva 298). As the Latin etymology of the word "dissident" informs, Kristeva's intellectual is someone who *sits separately*, that is to say, apart from the majority in the public assembly, on the other side of a cohesive, organized group, at the margins of the noise of public speech. Her intellectual is more akin to a silent observer absorbed in the task of dissolving and undoing. As such her revised figure conjures a theoretical tradition, that would comprise Walter Benjamin, Georges Bataille, Jacques Derrida, for which the invention of concepts *is* in itself a form of dissent, for which, as Kristeva writes, "[t]rue dissidence is thought" (299).

My research positions Susan Sontag in this tradition. She *came* to occupy the analytical position that Kristeva theorizes. In Sontag's case, this position should be understood as an achievement. In the archives I encountered a different Sontag. Neither the nostalgic modernist nor the aggressive self-made icon, she appears, instead, as someone leaning toward what in her notebooks she calls "the situation of thinking," advancing toward it, moving slowing, in a progressive sliding motion that resembles a graceful fall.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> My presentation relies on materials in the Susan Sontag Papers, housed in Special Collections at UCLA in the summer of 2011. It also relies on my research in the Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, in the Spring of 2010. I wish to thank both institutions and their wonderful librarians. Special thanks to Amy Wong, Brandon Barton, and all the staff of the Special Collections reading room of the

The archives give us a woman trained in philosophy who abandons her primary discipline in the late 1950s to turn to literary and art criticism. In the 1970s, after years of reading Walter Benjamin in different languages and different countries, and as she was writing *On Photography*, the art that, according to Benjamin, best encapsulated modernity's democratizing impulse, did she return to philosophical questions overtly. In the summer of 1976, just a year before *On Photography* went to press as a volume, Sontag wonders about the accuracy about Plato's metaphor of the cave. Thinking, it seems to her, is more like a going down into the cave rather than an ascent into light. In her journals she describes having an insight as a "(voluntary) confinement," a descent into darkness.<sup>2</sup>

Her journals enable us to follow her in such a descent until what she calls the situation of thinking from the sense of a plunge into darkness further rarifies into a "mood, a tone," then melts into a passionate vacillation and vulnerability, until thinking must be protected with abstinence from critical writing. In 1980 she resolves to give up writing essays because it is a "demagogic activity"; she must assume to be the bearer of truths she believes she is far from possessing.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I propose that Sontag's turn to photography be grasped as one with her fall into the situation of thinking and that it resulted from her shift from Said's heroic individual to Kristeva's dissident observer.

In a photograph taken by Diana Davies at an anti-Vietnam War event in 1967 Sontag is captured before an audience.<sup>4</sup> She is standing, surrounded by an assembly of spectators, some sitting on chairs, some on the floor. The arrangement only underscores her position as a public intellectual in Edward Said's terms: she is someone who "visibly represents a standpoint" and "who makes articulate representations to [and for] [her] public" (Said 12). It is precisely this choreography that would come under attack in her work. First in "On Style" where the crowd of viewers becomes an audience of voyeuristic spectators, and then in "A Trip to Hanoi" (summer of 1968), where she comes up against a quiet epistemological catastrophe, and must grapple with the loss of insight precipitated by the shortcomings of political language and the hardened dichotomies it imposes: Vietnamese and Americans, them and us.<sup>5</sup>

The crisis combined with her dissent from the dominant model of women intellectuals at the time. As a public intellectual, Sontag rose with the feminist moment. Feminist expression relied on a new faith in the power of language to transform history. It rested on an image of women in the act of achieving the dynamic position of linguistic subjects, rising from the torpor of the mind, poised on the threshold of speech. Second wave feminist intellectuals contemporary to Sontag embodied this new faith in language. Photography consigns them to us as activists, public speakers but also documents the degree to which feminist dissent was confined within the scene of representative speech.

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Charles E. Young Research Library at UCLA for the exceptional kindness and the generosity they have shown in assisting me during my first encounter with the Sontag papers and for approving my presentation of selected fragments from the Sontag materials at the Conference at which this paper was originally delivered.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag Papers, box 128, folder 1, Notebook 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag Papers, box 128, folder 8, Notebook 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Diana Davis, Susan Sontag 1967, in Diana Davis Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>5</sup> See Susan Sontag, "On Style" and "A Trip to Hanoi."

Gloria Steinem is a good example because this feminist leader belongs to Sontag's generation. Photographs of Gloria Steinem capture her while speaking in public, at women's solidarity rallies where the podium and the microphone, the banners and the crowds, or the cameras, become the defining props of the scene of utterance.<sup>6</sup>

In the Steinem Papers at Smith College, there is a photograph labelled *Gloria Steinem at the podium* (1970) taken by Lynn Spence. The full length profile puts on display the signs of Steinem's femininity: the print dress, her mass of hair, the sling backs. Her image becomes a collage of her "feminine" traits *and* the public arena of speech, a collage that emphasizes the achievement of linguistic subjectivity as a rebellion against norms and politically codes the public intellectual as heroic. By contrast, in the most compelling Sontag images at this same time, Sontag evokes a slow gouging out of meaning, the silent decoding of signs. Her iconic black uniform prevents the disclosure of the gender-collage: head and body are united; the uniform is about this flawless suture. While the Steinem images convey a sense of the progression of the woman toward the podium, Sontag's image is more claustrophobic. In Peter Hujar's portrait she is reclining in a bare, bookless interior, gaze averted. She is the private side of feminism's political dissent, the critical side of ideology, less Said's heroic individual and more Kristeva's dissident observer absorbed in "a process of destruction and (re)construction" (Gilloch 86).

When she turned to photography, in the 1970s, she simultaneously moved further toward the situation of thinking and departed from the dominant image of the feminist intellectual. She had encountered photography through Walter Benjamin, more than a decade earlier. At first, surfaces were ambiguous: rapacious in their beautifying power yet liberating because they allowed for an aesthetic view of the world. They helped her discover an alternative American modernism that, from Whitman's sensuous levelling to the heroic visions of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Robert Frank, Walker Evans, championed a desirable immersion in the "polysensual world" (*On Photography* 93). Later, as she studied photography's potential for aestheticizing politics, especially totalitarianism, she became interested in the degree to which harrowing photographs amplify the psychic life of power. In the case of the Abu Ghraib photographs, for example, she concurred with other commentators that the images of torture illustrate the obscene underside of power.<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Žižek had explained that the glee on the perpetrators' faces marks the enjoyment of their double identification with the Law *and* with "the object of fantasy" who has privileged access to the very enjoyment that we must forego as the price of joining civilized life.<sup>8</sup> Sontag did not deny that photographs of atrocities are powerful narratives of the national unconscious, but she was more caught up with the idea that they externalize a collective architecture of power while stopping short of undoing its necessity.

As she argued in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), her last book, they can encourage a new abstract, critical expressionism while becoming an instrument of "collective instruction": "Photographs that everyone recognizes are now a constituent

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<sup>6</sup> I am relying in particular on the Cary Herz and Dori Jacobson photographic collection in their papers in the Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, as well as on a number of unsigned photographs of Steinem in the Gloria Steinem Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Sontag, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2004 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine>>.

<sup>8</sup> Žižek, Slavoj. "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib." <[http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what\\_rumsfeld\\_doesnt\\_know\\_that\\_he\\_knows\\_about\\_abu\\_ghraib/](http://www.inthesetimes.com/site/main/article/what_rumsfeld_doesnt_know_that_he_knows_about_abu_ghraib/)>.

part of what a society chooses to think about, or declares that it has chosen to think about” (85). The main theme of her last book, the second on photography, is the urgency *to hear* the questions with which photographs of atrocities address thought—to *hear* them, to *move* beyond a thinking reduced to a “stipulating.”

Progressively, in her meditation on photography that led to *Regarding the Pain of Others*, the spacing of power between perpetrator and victim, illustrated by many harrowing photographs, becomes the emblem of the metaphysical distance inherent in the photographic gaze. Surfaces, once democratizing, now divide the world between observers and victims. The observers lie safe, huddled in themselves at a secure distance from the victims of horror and pain; the distance seems unbridgeable unless the observer puts himself or herself, corporeally, in the place of the victim, which often means on the side of death.

It is perhaps no coincidence that anyone who looks into Sontag’s research materials for *Regarding the Pain of Others* is struck by the return of an image from the past, one already encountered elsewhere in her papers. The image was published on the front page of the Paris Herald Tribune on June 9, 1972 and documents an incident at Trang Bang during the Vietnam war. It shows Vietnamese children running from disaster; among them, at the center of the frame, a naked girl whose nakedness emphasizes the look of horror and pain on the other children’s faces. The photograph was taken at the same time that Sontag had begun to meditate on photography and was attracted to the aesthetic view it afforded. Its return among the later research materials is a reminder of her own changed position. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* she proposed that harrowing photographs do now make us understand: they haunt us.<sup>9</sup> This is one of those images that haunt Sontag; the otherworldly vulnerability of the Vietnamese girl returns from the past to address *to* thought the question of the unbridgeable distance between viewer and viewed, victim and executioner.

For Sontag, this spacing of power inherent to harrowing photographs is paralleled by a pervasive cultural appetite for seeming, one poignantly illustrated by in her novel *In America* by Shakespearean actor Edwin Booth who tells the protagonist: “there is nothing on the other side of seeming, Marina. Except death” (*In America* 373-374). Grappling with the conundrum of power and seeming, between her last novel and her last essay on photography Sontag appears more than ever as Kristeva’s dissident observer who has realized that “to live is to be photographed,” that “to live is also to pose” (“Regarding the Torture of Others”) and “is waiting to break through seeming and performing, and just *be*” (*In America* 373-374). Like a solitary diver, Sontag readies herself for descent into the philosophical question of being. For, ultimately, photographs of atrocities haunt us precisely because they keep calling on thought with that question, they insist on awaking us to that question. If being is being-for-the-camera, that is, if is entangled in a shameless posing that is a manifestation of our willingness to aestheticize power, then the question becomes: How can we stop living for the camera?

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<sup>9</sup> For the debate spurred by this controversial point, see Judith Butler’s response “Photography, War, Outrage,” *PMLA* 120.3 (May 2005): 822-827, later published as “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking With Sontag,” in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009) 63-100.

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MARINA MORBIDUCCI

FROM *HOW TO WRITE* (1931) TO *BRAIN VERSIONING 1.0* (2008), AND BACK:  
TRANSMUTATIONS AT WORK

The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition, it confuses, it shows, it is, it looks, it likes it as it is, and this makes what is seen as it is seen. Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.

Gertrude Stein, 1926

This talk ideally revolves around three main axes: translational ideologies and their consequences on the practice of translation; Gertrude Stein's *ante-litteram* postmodernist deconstructionism, particularly in compositional procedures; contemporary hypertextual, cyborg & digital poetics, implemented by the new media.

1. The first level acts as foreground to my reasoning, and regards the set of attitudes and choices in terms of ideology and poetics which any translator comes to grips with when in the process of translating: the “total’nyj perevod” stance postulated by Peeter Torop provides the leading thread in an ideology of translation where by “total translation” we mean a process in which—even though for each level of the source language we might find a corresponding element in the target language—that substitution does not necessarily take place through “equivalents.” The concept of “totality” is not absolute but relative; on the other hand, the term “transmutation” quoted in the title is clearly taken from R. Jakobson’s definition: we call “intersemiotic translation” or “transmutation,” “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems” (113). For instance, two levels of transmutation always occur with a double intersemiotic passage, when we take into account the linguistic transformation which proceeds from reading the source text to writing the target text: in the reading phase we have a transmutation as we shift from a verbal level, the one of the text, to a mental level, the one of our interpretation of signs in a stage where language in our mind is not yet structured and manifested as such, but is in the process of providing a linguistic formulation; accordingly, we realize an intersemiotic passage from any written text to our reading it; in a parallel way, we witness another transmutating change when from the mental text produced by our reading act—with no corporeal basis but in the chemistry of firing neurons connecting through dendrites into synapses—we process via words the original content, pouring it in the written text produced in the target language which is translation. Such intersemiotic vision of translation informs my reading of Gertrude Stein, too.

2. The second axis is provided by my reading of Stein: in the title, a specific reference is made to the collection of language studies contained in *How to Write*, first published in 1931 by Plain Edition; in the eight pieces therein included, Stein provides ample demonstration of her deconstructive strategy in terms of canonically grammatical forms and compositional procedures. The pieces have different length and were all written in the period 1927-1930. Ulla Dydo, in her *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises 1923-1934*, analyzes the manuscripts at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and follows chronologically, step by step, line by line, her production.

It is not accidental that Gertrude Stein clarifies her stances with regards to grammar, composition, and linguistic meditations, with major intensity, just in the same period during which she was working—together with Georges Hugnet and Virgil Thomson—at the French translation of her selected passages from *The Making of Americans* (1925) (*Morceaux choisis*, to be then published in France). She was also working on other French publications, as Ulla Dydo exhaustively reports in her book; in Gertrude Stein's letter to Virgil Thomson, postmark 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1928, she notes: “we are peacefully and completely translating” (Dydo, 290).

Presumably, just when Stein was more literally immersed in translation, in the same years she was also deepening her critical stance towards language and its appropriation and application in the process of composition. It wouldn't be surprising, after all, that the practice of translation imported a meditation on language.

The titles of the pieces contained in *How to Write* (published in November 1931 and as they appear in the Dover publication of 1995, with an Introduction by P. Meyerowitz) namely are: “Saving the sentence” (1929); “Sentences and paragraphs. A sentence is not emotional a paragraph is” (1930); “Arthur a Grammar” (1928); “A Grammarian” (1930); “Sentences” (1928); “Regular regularly in narrative” (1927); “Finally George a vocabulary of thinking” (1928); “Forensics” (1931). The volume's number of pages is 395. Considering the extension and complexity of these pieces, we cannot deal with them into details, but only state that they provide the theoretical assumptions on the basis of which Stein was then, and even earlier, composing her writings. This is explicitly stated by the author herself, in her letter to Charles Henri Ford, dated Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1931, where she refers to the essays as “my long series of meditations on writing” (Dydo, 406).

According to Claudia Franken, *How to Write* is “a panoptical presentation of poetic writing as determined by a ‘Grammar,’ a ‘Vocabulary,’ and ‘Forensics’”; “[it] negotiates the question of how to maintain the promise of *poesis*” (265). Stein appears in the *persona* of a grammarian, devoted to interpret the significances of words and their properties, in a completely idiosyncratic way. Let's consider the following quote from “A Grammarian”:

I am a grammarian.  
 ...  
 Grammar.  
 I made it do.  
 That is simple I made it do.  
 ...  
 Grammar. Fills me with delight.  
 I am having it as a habit.  
 Now the trouble with this is there is a conflict and not in thought, but in reality.  
 I am having it. Is that a possible tense. No it is not. No it isn't. I am having it as a habit.

... Is completely false in reflection. The use of the word so. ... The essence of grammar is that it is freed of following.

I was blown away by the wind. The wind has blown it away. The difference there is not interesting. If the wind blows you can see it. (105-106)

As we can see, Stein dismantles the orthodoxy of grammar, and adjusts the system to her expressive urges which obviously need a new vision of grammaticality; she attributes to grammar the great quality of creating and articulating reality; she makes “it do” only in this way the actual texture of existence occurs through words; the artificiality of verb tenses, for instance, is “false in reflection,” and the “essence of grammar,” is to be “freed of following”: In her use of language, the author is a pathfinder. For Stein, language engages reality, and when she provokes us, in the same piece, by saying, “Forget grammar and think about potatoes” (109), she invites her audience to be alert rather with regards to life. The difference between the passive and active mood is not interesting for her: “if the wind blows you can see it.”

Openly declaring that she loves diagramming (see, among others, the lecture “Plays,” 1935), and reacted with disappointment any time publishers would turn down her work as ungrammatical, she writes in a perfectly grammatical way: she respects the structure of the English language in all its parts of speech, and follows the traditional word order; what she does, rather, is breaking the sequence, opening it up, discarding the canonical system making the concept take shape in a fragmented, reiterated, almost stammering way—it is not by chance that her writing procedure has been lately juxtaposed to rap techniques like scratching, back-spinning and so forth (Mills, 2003). She inserts in the sentence many more prepositions, conjunctions, personal pronouns, relative pronouns and clause, neutral words, etc., than usually expected or grammatically necessary, thus originating a sense of displacement disappointing the reading habits and subverting the usual expectations. She implements, in a massive way, what in translation is customarily defined as “transposition” by interchanging the parts of speech in their relevant functions (especially adopting the -ing suffix for a large part of nouns); opening up the “mind map” of each semantic element (applying *ante-litteram* the hyper-textual path of linguistic signification); creating an unprecedented modality of nexus among the parts of speech. This way the final meaning does not lie in the referential message, but rather in the disruptive action of language at work in a totally subversive form, against the inherited canon. One cannot but think of Marjorie Perloff’s (1990) deconstruction: “canon” into “can(n)on.”

Going back to the Steinian “grammar” cipher described in *How to Write*, Franken adds that in that “treatise” we can find: “Arthur’s territory, concerned with propriety of expression. There is the place of ‘Regular Regularly’ and that of the ‘Georges’: narration/digression and force, method and grace of thought. And there is the realm of ‘Sentences’ and of justness of thought in argumentation, a Forensics which ‘may pale’ over time” (270). As for “Finally George. A Vocabulary of Thinking,” Franken defines it “a unique parodic epistemology *in nuce* and a motivistic treatise on the role the method of thought plays in literary composition, although this text is crucial to the understanding of *How to Write*” (270).

The subversive grammatical function performed by *How to Write* is well underpinned also by Patricia Meyerowitz’s Preface to the work: “HOW TO WRITE [sic] is a concentration of GS [sic] thinking about words, sentences, paragraphs, grammar and narrative. There is no better way of understanding it than by trying it yourself” (xxiv). Meyerowitz invites us to reproduce Stein’s idiosyncratic style in order

to internalize it: “a spontaneous creation of writing thinking and feeling all done at the same time”; she then adds that in *How to write* Gertrude Stein “demonstrates sentences made at the time of thinking. That is thinking and writing done together so that no part of you or the action is separate or behind any other part” (xxiv). Certainly, such simultaneity of thought may be assimilated to the temporal interactional texture of the hypertext, as we will see in *Brain Versioning 1.0*.

In the following excerpt drawn from “Regular regularly in narrative,” for instance, the typically Steinian procedure of: avoiding any form of punctuation; shifting the temporal level from present to past to conditional—via modals—in the use of verbal forms; exposing syntactical strings in full flux often skipping the logical transition particles; syntactical and lexical repetitions; semantic redundancy; tautology; the discursive texture of spoken chunks; and so on, are all elements that shape a novel expressive mould disentangled from the constraints of rational thinking organized in logical sequences, and well juxtapose to the free meandering of the digital texts in the hyper-textual dimension. Stein first teaches us the myriads of combinations that our mind can forge once the mental plasticity of language is let loose in the field of creativity. Flexibility in originating a process writing, or form of reading, or interpreting threads, is what these unconventional manifestations of linguistic forms share to the core:

It always happened that it aroused them in the way that it was mentioned that they had their own arrangement for everything and that in every way for awhile which is why they were very able to be next to then when they were able could they be with held withheld from leaving it having it not best of all which is why by their leaving it ... does it make any matter any difference any matter that that that they can in this way be their own leave it for them best to be always ready just as much as ever while it can be more than they can care to have nearly as often as Sunday which is why in this way to be spoken letting it have more than is more than is theirs ... and ordinarily really to be what is it when it does not make any difference. (Stein 222-23)

Here the compositional process of the narrative is being re-enacted: through the transmutations operated by our mind trying to interpret the text which lacks referential meaning, we make sense of it: no stories, but dramas. The connecting tension can be either phonetic or rhetorical; visual or structural; the structure of the sentence is respected but the syntax explodes: such is Stein’s “grammar.” The unconventional impact of her compositions has an astounding similarity with some new media experiments. Her mind appears as capable of dissecting thinking in writing.

As we know, during her medical studies at Johns Hopkins University, in the late 1890s, Stein was assigned a research topic studying and drawing brain tracts: Maria Farland, in her “Gertrude Stein’s Brain at Work” (2004) well depicts Stein’s involvement in science and her inner rebellion within the academic context; she would eventually never become a doctor, but a fine expert of the human mind, in depth. Stephen Meyer thoroughly articulates the relationship between science and writing in Stein: “[i]nstead of being modeled on scientific experimentation, her writing turns out to be a form of experimental science itself” (xxi).

3- Finally, the third axis regards the cyborg approach experimented by Katie Clapham in *Brain Versioning 1.0*—in the journal *How2*, 3.3 (2008)—where the author presents how to digitally “linguitise” brain tracts. Since the piece is hypertextual, in

order to read it, we must click on the link: [http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol\\_3\\_no\\_3/new\\_media/clapham/brain-versioning-intro.html](http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_3/new_media/clapham/brain-versioning-intro.html)

When I first read *Brain Versioning 1.0*, the connection with Stein appeared immediate; the genesis and articulation of the digital experiment is explained by the author herself in the methodology essay she made available, and also confirmed in the following letter, dated October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011; here is an excerpt:

Dear Marina,

[t]he trigger word for this project was 'remediation', a term introduced to me by Bolter and Grusin's essay of the same name, the process of translating something from one media to another and in particular, the digitalisation of the real world. They gave examples like the familiar desktop scenario of a computer with its files and trash can and I extended the idea to explore the remediation of something living. It occurred to me that language undergoes a specific **translation** into a digital code before it can exist in a digital location and the human involvement in this process is inextricable. Whether occurring during input or output, the human is at some point, a **translating device**. **So in order to digitise the human brain (the part of the human I chose to translate for its obvious similarities to digital technology, being built on links and synapses to pass messages) I resolved to remediate the brain into language** (literally the brain as we understand it in our familiar language; the named part) **and then remediate the language to a digital setting.**

The text I made began procedurally blending words from two different lists I had created; one using a nurses handbook and the other a list of digital-specific vocabulary I had populated myself. I wrote out my own long description of the brain processes making it as detailed as I could. I then separated the details of functions from the text into a list, and kept track of which words in the text related to each function, so they could eventually be linked back together. I exchanged key words from the description with their new version from my '**dicabulary of the brain**', the description was now of a digital brain. The key words would remediate functions of the brain in the digital presentation with faithful links to the corresponding active parts. I was also eager to find a way of writing a text that 'does' on a linguistic level—this was important as the digital settings itself was not reliant on algorithms or any functioning digital coding that I could program—the pages themselves are static and the language is the active factor. I investigated Pound's ideogrammic method as a poetics that translated image to text without distance. I used these oriental stylings to inform the text to represent the functions and add linguistic immediacy. I built the website using static page links and pop-ups to remediate the linguistic brain to its digital setting.

The piece is successful in its execution as an experiment, the ultimate goal of digitalising living matter remains incomplete because the digitised-linguistic brain has no ability to respond in its current state. ...

The 'case report' that accompanies the piece is semi-fictional, it retains the original process but in a fairly brief manner and written in a style that tries to simulate a report in a medical journal. The text is included as a set-piece to enforce the experimental nature of the work and work written after the work was created. ...

[T]he text was written through the named source material, intercut with the new blended vocabulary, to mirror the true functioning of the active brain and simply presented in a digital format, taking advantage of the links and pop-ups to simulate the function of the brain the text describes. The compositions that describe functions appearing on pop-ups are original poems with no source material. **This is the digital remediation of the linguistic translation of the brain as matter.** [T]he work cannot exist offline or in paper form as it relies on the links but certainly I think the process and reasons for beginning the experiment are specifically in line with your topics of translation and composition.

Best wishes,

Katie

(emphasis mine)

In her letter, Katie also added that she had spent a lot of her degree time working on Gertrude Stein: "so I tend to find links with her in all my work, she is an continual influence on my poetic practice."

However different in time, perspective and constructs, the three axes design overlapping poetic layers, which share experimentation, innovation, and energy: from canon to can(n)on, indeed.

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KIM NALLEY

LOSING ITS GREASE: BLACK CULTURAL POLITICS  
AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF JAZZ

In 2007, a prominent jazz club produced a tenth anniversary sampler CD that featured no African-Americans. Although the *San Francisco Chronicle's* newspaper headline on June 1, 2007 read "Blacks decry exclusion," the chief complaint from jazz fans was not that Blacks were excluded, but rather that no one noticed. While color-blind racism continues to be a problem within the US, for many jazz fans, the absence of Black performers on a Jazz sampler CD should have been as noticeable as an absence of Black performers on a Hip-Hop sampler CD. However it was not.

From the 1910s through the 1930s, the term *jazz* encompassed any music played by Black Americans or in the style of Black Americans. Originally derisively considered race music or "debased Negroid music," jazz has since become accepted as a legitimate art form in the United States and around the world. Some non-American musicians play in the "hot" style, while others have abandoned the Black idiom altogether choosing to insert their own country's folk idiom in its place. What has remained constant in the globalization of jazz is the reverence for Western classical musical traditions and values and the institutionalization of jazz under these paradigms. Black jazz musicians swell the ranks neither of academic jazz scholarship nor of jazz institutions. Black jazz musicians are not well represented as jazz critics, major label executives, or producers. Although jazz has gained legitimacy, many of the older Black jazz legends are still playing in "some small dive" and their music is increasingly misdescribed as Blues, while music that sounds closer to Schoenberg is labeled jazz. Does jazz represent freedom and democracy through difference, or cultural appropriation and racial amnesia?

Anne Phillips notes, in *Democracy and Difference*, that "Democracy implies equality, but when it is superimposed on an unequal society, some people count for more than others" (91). Jazz history is not merely cataloging and analyzing the music, but also documenting and analyzing the social and cultural history. Jazz is a subculture as much as it is a musical genre. Because jazz history is shrouded in segregation and racism, the dynamics of Afro-Americans as subaltern within the United States are essential in the development and globalization of jazz. Sound bites such as "Music has no color" and "Jazz is multicultural" result in a subtle reconstruction of history that invalidates the experiences of countless jazz musicians whose color, culture, and gender mattered both on stage and off.

This paper will explore how the elevation of jazz as a democratic art form, combined with the continued debasement of Blacks, resulted in the diminishment of Black

American aesthetic elements, values, and representation in jazz. In other words, jazz was losing its grease.<sup>1</sup>

Jazz is a mercurial term. Definitions such as, “Jazz is Freedom and Democracy” and “Jazz is an exercise in individualism,” have loaded the term with so much political baggage that at times it is difficult, today, to discern what is jazz. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper noted in “Beyond ‘Identity’”:

“Soft” constructivism allows putative “identities” to proliferate. But as they proliferate, the term loses its analytical purchase. If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere. If it is fluid, how can we understand the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal, and crystallize? If it is constructed, how can we understand the sometimes coercive force of external identifications? (1)

“Jazz is Freedom and Democracy” and “Jazz has no color” are examples of clichéd constructivism that contribute to historical amnesia. Jazz is not simply a musical genre; it is a transnational subculture with a strong unique sense of self-identity constructed in part by external forces such as segregation and post-colonialism (Atkins 5-6).

Once jazz became popular and then subsequently a form of high Culture,<sup>2</sup> many races and cultures were eager to claim jazz as its birthright, but during the early part of the twentieth century, the hallmark of jazz was that it was barbarous, derivative Negro music and was largely denigrated. For example, in 1922 the Reverend Dr. Percy Stickney Grant advised his parishioners that jazz “is retrogression. It is going to the African jungle for our music. It is a savage crash and bang. It makes you clatter on all fours and whisk your tail around a tree” (see “Rector Calls Jazz National Anthem,” *The New York Times* January 30, 1922).

While most of the complaints about jazz in the 1920s have to do with it being the opposite of Eurocentric Culture, many of its compliments were based on the same. The ideas connecting Jazz and Freedom were derived in contrast to the more constrictive European Cultural aesthetics. Black or the Negro aesthetics included passion, spirituality, expressiveness, and emphasis on the performer as an individual as opposed to European highbrow cultural morays in which the composer and conductor, refinement and intellectualism were tantamount. One sat down to absorb Classical music. In contrast, one jumped up and danced to feel and engage with Jazz. Personal taste determined whether these were good qualities or not, but regardless they were associated with Negroes and race music.

In order to examine the roots of Black aesthetics it is necessary to examine pre-colonial African musical aesthetics. Günther Schuller notes that traditional African music was distinguished by the lack of separation between low culture and high culture, or, art. Music encompassed all aspects of life (Schuller 3-5). All music was sacred. Religiosity permeated every aspect of life. African music is comprised of three essential elements: voice, drums, and dance. Basil Davidson notes, “Many of the songs are

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<sup>1</sup> The term *grease* implies dirt or a stain in the derogatory sense, but in Black American vernacular *grease* also has a positive meaning. Greasy is Bluesy, and in the pocket. It is the guttural cry of a sax that mimics the growl of the human voice moaning. Music with grease is smooth and dirty in a positive sense. Grease or oil is often used to moisturize the roots of Afro-textured hair. It is also used to rub on dry elbows and knees to get rid of white “ashy” flakes so the skin can shine dark and glistening. Similarly, if a Black person says “We need some grease up in this joint!” then they are saying the place lacks either Black people or Black aesthetics.

<sup>2</sup> Following a convention employed by Lawrence Levine, Culture with a capital C is used to denote the arts.

similar, the drum patterns although highly complex are engrained, the steps are known by all. What distinguishes the celebrated artist is how well they perform” (163).

Jazz shares several African musical esthetics. It focuses on a book of well-known tunes and repetitive improvised choruses, or, to quote Louis Armstrong, “It is not what you play it is how you play it that makes it jazz.” The sacred nature of all music, the passionate responsive traits, the importance of the musical trilogy drums-voice-dance, and the emphasis of the performer over the composer are African aesthetic constituents in early jazz that become minimized. In a bid to move from low to high Culture, jazz would excise the undesirable or Black aesthetics that made it jazz in the first place.

The 1920s and 1930s gave birth to a number of White musicians who were enamored with the aesthetics of Black jazz musicians. White musicians who began to play in the “hot style”—“hot” meaning with a Negro aesthetics such as Benny Goodman, Eddie Condon, Gene Krupa, and George Wettling—often honed their skills with Black musicians, sometimes at jam sessions and other times through mentorship such as between Krupa and Chick Webb or Goodman and Fletcher Henderson (Levine 14). White musicians helped make jazz popular music by toning down some of the “undesirable aesthetics” such as rapid drumming tempos and polyrhythms and by simply being White performers.

The explosion of jazz as popular music did not equal racial mobility for Black musicians. If one was a Black jazz musician, one’s roles were still highly circumscribed. The skyrocketing popularity of jazz combined with the American Negro’s position as a subjugated subordinate in the United States would greatly affect the development of jazz as American Whites and then later Europeans began participating and partaking in greater numbers before Blacks and Black culture had a chance to establish equality. By the 1930s, Maude Cuney-Hare complained that, “[j]ust as the White minstrels blackened their faces and made use of the Negro idiom, so have White orchestral players today usurped the Negro in jazz entertainment” (Cuney-Hare 148).

Many narratives claim that jazz was integrated, but while the races intermingled, it did not mean the races were equal. Whites could go to Black neighborhoods in order to sit in at jam sessions, but the converse was not true. Race music was rarely distributed outside of Black neighborhoods. There were two unions – one Black and one White – with unequal pay scales and unequal opportunities for gigs. These “wages of whiteness” (Roediger, 1999) contributed to the dissolution of the Black Fletcher Henderson Orchestra vis-à-vis the success of the Benny Goodman Orchestra, with Henderson selling his book of arrangements to Goodman.

In a short time, White jazz musicians outstripped their Black mentors in popularity, influence, and box office draw. Benny Goodman would become known as the King of Swing, and Paul Whiteman as the King of Jazz, commanding salaries of up to 1,000,000 dollars per year (see *DownBeat* 13) while Chick Webb made 75 dollars per week (Nicholson 27, 64). Although Goodman did much to include Black players, the *Gesellschaft* of jazz was even stronger. Most White musicians did not turn down gigs because a more worthy Black player was being overlooked. The segregation of the musical unions further solidified an unstable footing for Black musicians, even in a musical genre that was a Black vernacular.

Jazz soon began to mirror European classical music conventions. Despite having roots in which female vocalists, such as Bessie Smith, played dominant roles as bandleaders and organizers, vocalists began to play a less prominent role. Classical singers are largely operatic singers conscripted to the whims of the composer/conductor

and the physical appearance required for the role. Similarly, the jazz vocalist became a canary, a caged bird expected to look pretty on the sidelines and then sing one to two songs on demand. The prejudice against singers was so pervasive that it was argued in panels and print that there was no such animal as a jazz singer (Ertegun 6-9). Billie Holiday is commonly remembered as being a Blues singer. Blues was considered by many to be a lowbrow, emotional form of entertainment. In comparison, jazz was beginning to be considered an intellectual high art form. Calling Holiday a Blues singer rather than a jazz musician in many cases diminishes her genius, while reinforcing her Blackness.

With the rise of the Civil Rights movement, the push for racial inclusion gave way to a bid for equal rights. Bop and Post-bop expression demanded recognition that jazz was an art form. Many Black musicians demanded respect for their profession. Several had the opportunity to attend college or conservatory courtesy of the GI bill and were ready to transform themselves and peoples' perception of them. They advocated that jazz musicians were serious artists, not simply entertainment for Whites. Those who did not conform to the movement were derided. Most notably, both Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie came under censor for “mugging” (making faces such as rolling the eyes), with Armstrong becoming cursed with the Uncle Tom moniker (Giddins, 2001; Friedwald 40; Holbrook 178). The 1950s and 1960s became an era of Black McCarthyism, in which many Blacks were caught between the Scylla of acting too “niggerish” or the Charybdis of acting too “bougie” (bourgeoisie). Either offense was seen as a detriment to the Black struggle.

Several features of the Black aesthetics were minimized in the Civil Rights period. It was no longer acceptable to dance to jazz. It made the musicians feel as if they were jukeboxes instead of artists. Voice was no longer *de rigueur* to instrumentation as the Big Band gave way to the jazz quintet. The move from bars to concert halls changed the band's relationship to the audience. Call-and-response, an integral part of the jazz tradition, is poorly executed in a concert hall. The ebb and flow of the audience punctuating and shaping a solo, has its roots in the Black church. A congregation's “Amen,” and “Yes, Lord” egg on a preacher or gospel singer in much the same way as an audience's “Tell it like it T-I-S” and “testify” egg on a jazz soloist (see Gates). The new direction of legitimate jazz was to embrace classical music mores in presentation. As a result, the demographics of the audience and hence the jazz community changed in both race and economic status (Atkins 6). With an audience that was becoming less Black and more elite, the jazz community also began losing its grease.

During the Cold War, jazz was touted as being on par with classical music and exported in an international diplomatic exercise of soft power (Von Eschen, 2006). Soon jazz began to mimic the institutional structure of classical music. Europe, America and later Asia, began to formalize jazz education at the university level. University degrees in jazz performance, education and composition helped legitimize jazz, however the teaching model was styled after Western classical music and values. A few universities hire prominent Black jazz musicians who lack doctorates, but most Black Americans lack the advanced degrees needed to teach at a university level.

Non-profit educational jazz organizations, that host jazz festivals, also began to proliferate in this period. Their function mimics that of the Symphony or Ballet, in which artists are partially subsidized by grants and donors. Grants are awarded on a rubric similar to classical music, meaning composed music rather than improvised music is valued. Instrumental music is better subsidized than vocal jazz. Harmonics are valued over rhythms, and so forth. Therefore, jazz musicians trained in composition

have a far better chance of being subsidized. This is alarming for two reasons. First, jazz is traditionally a vernacular, not composed art form. Second, there are great racial inequalities in the terms of access to higher education.<sup>3</sup> Grant recipients need academic skills and credentials to deserve the grant. Certain positions at non-profits might require a Masters degree in order to ensure continued funding for the organization. Many Black musicians are unable to fulfill the requirements of jazz under an institutional model and simply become invisible.

The result is an art form that differs so radically from its roots that it struggles with questions of ethno-racial authenticity and popularity. Taylor Adkins writes:

There is much cultural capital, racial pride and national prestige invested in jazz. The music is part of the integral image that the United States projects of itself abroad and of the image African Americans promote ... in their legitimate efforts to redress the erasure of their contributions from history. (11)

The point of contention is not merely the lacking representation of Black faces in jazz but also an issue over values, aesthetics, and power structures. Despite the widespread practice and consumption of jazz, “have African-American ideas actually changed the European structure?” (Raphael-Hernandez 3). Or has jazz simply become whitewashed world music? Unlike Blues, R&B, Gospel and Hip-hop, Jazz seems divorced from the category of Black American music, despite the best efforts to reclaim it. Musicians such as Nicholas Payton, Duke Ellington and Nina Simone feel as if the term jazz is so tainted and usurped that they refuse to use it.<sup>4</sup> Jazz audiences are scarce and lack large Black demographics. In a 2007 interview, saxophonist Houston Person explains: “People stopped coming to hear us when jazz started losing its grease. How is anybody supposed to have a good time without any grease up in the joint?”

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<sup>3</sup> For data consult “Black Student College Graduation Rates Inch Higher But the Large Racial Gap Persists,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, n.d., <http://www.jbhe.com/preview/winter07/preview.html>.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see: “An Open Letter To My Dissenters On Why Jazz Isn’t Cool Anymore,” *Nicholas Payton*, <http://nicholaspayton.wordpress.com/2011/12/02/1319/>; Michael G. Kammen, *Contested Values: Democracy and Diversity in American Culture* (St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 211.

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PAOLA ANNA NARDI

“THIS NEIGHBORHOOD WAS KIND OF LIKE HOME”:  
AMERICAN CITIES IN IRISH-AMERICAN FICTION

The most eloquent and widely known representations of the complex and varied Irish-American identity rest on works written by contemporary successful authors who often choose urban surroundings as a background for the adventures of their heroes or heroines. Frank McCourt's few strokes of Brooklyn in 1930s at the beginning of *Angela Ashes*, his world-widely acclaimed memoir of his childhood published in 1996, are unforgettable. New York is seen through the perspective of a child and made alive by its own voice that declares in the very first sentence of the book: "My father and mother should have stayed in New York" (Mccourt, *Angela Ashes* 1). The persuasion of New York as a place not to be left silently informs Frank's life till his adolescence and at the end of the book it turns out to be Frank's way out from the hell of Limerick in Ireland. Frank imagines the traditional "American Dream" journey over and over again, and it finally becomes a reality when at nineteen on board of the Irish Oak he reaches Manhattan, which looks to him like a vision from a movie. "The [dream] I had over and over was where I sailed into New York Harbor awed by the skyscrapers before me" (Mccourt, *'Tis* 1) confides Frank in the prologue of *'Tis*, his second memoir dealing with his going back to his place of birth, and where New York becomes one of the main characters in this tale of immigrant life and adaptation to a new environment.

In *Before My Time*, one of her "search for identity" (Ahearn 171) narrations, Maureen Howard chooses Boston and Brooklyn as the urban setting where to explore "the different modes of Irish assimilation by juxtaposing the lives of the descendants of two sisters emigrated from Ireland" (Ebest and McInerney 62). The two spaces testify to two different ways of living one's Irish heritage. Laura Quinn, the daughter of the sister who settled in Boston, had been completely absorbed in the blue-blood Boston society her mother had married into. "Trying to peel off the Irish or the New York I'd picked up from her mother" (Howard 90), according to Laura's own words, her father erases all traces of her Irish roots and cripples her identity. Laura metaphorically becomes homeless, living in a house she considers "not home" (Howard 90), and with a self "circumscribed and defined by others" (Ebest and McInerney 63). Firmly settled since her birth in the immigrant Irish Catholic community of Brooklyn, Mill Cogan, Laura's cousin, experiences not the loss but the trappings of Irish ethnicity, and her house, an apartment on Bruckner Boulevard, is a stifling place where not even plants can survive. When one of Mill's son, Jim, is sent to live for a time with Laura and her family, Boston and Brooklyn and the two different worlds, that they represent, clash, each one destabilizing the other.

According to historian John Joseph Lee, the 1930s are a period of transition for Irish America as this decade "marks the end of the immigration flow that had lasted since before the famine" (Lee and Casey 36). In this historic moment "Irish-American

identity was in the process of shifting from an immigrant context to something altogether different” (Dowd 154). James T. Farrell best portrays the ambiguous status and identity of the Irish-Americans in the transitional years of the 1930s in his work *Studs Lonigan: A Trilogy*. In this social saga Farrell tells the short life of Studs Lonigan focusing on his frustration due to the rapid dissolution of the Irish presence in his Side South Chicago neighborhood and the consequent uncertainties about his own self-definition: Studs’ short life is “a study in ethnic trauma; it is a tragic portrait of a young man whose entire identity is defined by his connections to an Irish-American community, but who does not know what it actually means to be Irish anymore” (Dowd 155).

The title of this essay reports the words of Studs Lonigan’s father, Patrick Lonigan, on the very day of his moving from his old house and neighborhood after selling his building to a black man. The conversation goes on and in the empty parlor of his house on Michigan Avenue Patrick confides his son that “[I] felt about [Chicago South Side] the same way I feel about Ireland, where I was born” (Farrell 373). The relocation in South Shore in one of the few buildings amid the prairie will turn him and his entire family into displaced persons: “Out there ... we are not what we used to be and it’ll be lonesome there sometimes” (Farrell 375).

If the 1930s are a time of transition for Irish America, the literature by Irish-Americans written after this period requires new approaches as it is almost always “a study of generations long removed from Ireland” (Lee and Casey 37) and no longer rooted in an immigrant context. The goal of this essay is to examine some of the Irish-Americans’ first responses to the urban space of the New World, by investigating works written by authors still depending on an immigrant narrative. These narrations often unknown to the large reading public have created a literary tradition and a background that could enrich the interpretation and understanding of the more recent tales on and by Irish-Americans.

Although Irish emigration to the United States dates back to the Colonial period when a few thousand mostly “Irish Presbyterians of Scottish descent” (Meagher 41) moved to the English colonies, particularly to the South, it is not until the mid-1840s that Irish people started to reach the United States in great number. The impressive potato famine, commonly referred to as “the Great Hunger,” that hit Ireland between 1845 and 1849, caused million deaths on the island forcing other millions to leave their motherland to survive. It is estimated that almost 3.5 million Irish people, almost all Catholic, entered the United States between 1820 and 1880. Peasants coming from a country largely rural, the greatest part of these Irish immigrants settled in metropolitan areas and adapted themselves to the hard life of American cities like New York, Boston, Chicago or San Francisco, now dramatically developing.

One of the first most fascinating and detailed descriptions of New York from the perspective of an Irish immigrant can be found in *The Adventures of Tom Stapleton*, a very popular serial published as a book in 1843 and written by John McDermott Moore, “the most intriguing of the forgotten pre-famine [Irish] writers” (Fanning, *Irish Voice* 26). A journalist, forced to leave Ireland because of revolutionary activities and not for economic reasons, McDermott Moore belongs to that first recognizable Irish-American literary generation that used satire, “a profoundly Irish Habit of mind” (Fanning, *Irish Voice* 15), as a natural response to American immigration. In what is still considered the most “marvelous, comprehensive and insightful survey of Irish-American fiction” (Meagher 346), Fanning declares that “the first Irish-American literary generation and its audience were sophisticated, highly literate, confident, and unthreatened by the

strange, new American culture in which they found themselves. This was an immigrant generation that could laugh at itself, at its foreign background, and at native American prejudice against it” (*Irish Voice* 38).

Poles apart from the desolate, desperate and uneducated flood of the Famine immigrants, in his novel McDermott Moore discusses several aspects of the life of the Irish in New York with a good-humored, light-hearted tone through the voice of Tom Stapleton, the narrator of his own adventures. Satire pervades the narration from the very beginning as while observing New York at night from a distance, Tom Stapleton refers to it as the “goodly city of Gotham”(3), the nickname that Washington Irving invented for New York City in his widely influential and popular satirical magazine, *Salmagundi*.<sup>1</sup>

Tom Stapleton rambles extensively throughout every corner of New York city and meets all its varied and bizarre inhabitants, offering a vivid portray of the city and its population in the highly revealing third chapter of the novel. Opposing its detractors unable to appreciate its immense treasures—“never was a place so libeled, slandered and vilified as the noble city of New York”(8)—Tom starts by saying what this urban space is not: New York is not “a mere, Dutch-built, matter-of-fact, unromantic sort of place” (8) merely concerned with business and commerce and with a fondness for “dissipation and highlife” (8). New York is instead the perfect place for the writer as it can offer him/her an immense variety of subjects, characters and stories, so promising that “the author who deals in them requires neither invention nor imagination, but mere a fair talent for telling the truth” (8). In a tone, half-hilarious and half-serious, Tom underlines New York’s preeminence all over the world “for characters, singular, distinctive, and numerous” (8) and for its peculiar vocation for attracting what he calls the “genius” (8) and the “remarkable” (8) of other countries, “the young gentlemen ... given to the popular accomplishment of making their native country too hot to hold them” (9), subtly implying the idea of New York as a refuge for the unwanted and the banned from all over the world.

The new Irish immigrant celebrates New York city. His images of New York as “a very mine of marvels, so ripe and teeming” (9), as the “Eldorado” (9) of the human kind, testify to his experiencing this urban space as a positive place of adventure and opportunity he is willing to explore to discover “its rare gems and precious metals” (9). Tom Stapleton often includes himself in the “we” he uses to refer to New Yorkers finding in the language a means of cultural assimilation and acceptance, apparently easily at hand in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Another interesting portrait of an American city is to be found in Charles Cannon’s novel *Bickerton or, The Immigrant Daughter* published in 1855. The son of Irish Catholic immigrants, without wealth and a proper education, Cannon could not fulfill his desire of becoming a professional writer and was forced to earn his living as a clerk. However, throughout his life he managed to compose several volumes of prose, plays and eight novels where he considers “the problems of being Irish and Catholic in America” (Fanning, *Exiles of Erin* 103) in the crucial years around the Famine. Charles Cannon renders the changes in the acceptance of Irish immigrants in America, mainly due to the huge floodtide of immigration to America caused by the Great Hunger in Ireland, and confronts “the collision of immigration and nativism that was disrupting American life in the early 1850s” (Fanning, *Irish Voice* 64).

*Bickerton* is an archetypal immigrant narrative that tells the story of its heroine,

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<sup>1</sup> Washington Irving is directly mentioned in the novel, although in another passage.

Aileen O'Hanlon, from the sad departure from Ireland, through the crossing, "the traumatic landing in an alien land, and the hard road to respectability" (Fanning, *Irish Voice* 64). One of the most revealing chapters of the book is the one entitled "Little Dublin" where, with a balanced realistic tone, Cannon describes in some details an urban Irish working-class neighborhood of an American city: "A port city, Bickerton suggests Boston, for 'Little Dublin' looks like the old North End during the Famine immigration" (Fanning, *Irish Voice* 65). The Irish section of the city is situated in the most ancient part of the town, an unchanged area, despite all deep transformations taking place around it, characterized by "houses, mostly of wood, of two stories in height, with small windows, and doors formed of an upper and lower part" (Cannon 169). Old, with narrow and "ill-paved" (169) streets, this urban ghetto does not convey an atmosphere of desolation and oppression. It is instead a picturesque, "old-fashioned" (170) but "comfortable" (170) neighborhood cheered up by the liveliness, youth and the great number of its inhabitants, "swarming" (170) all over the walks and streets.

Life in these Irish tenements is depicted as peculiarly "gregarious" (170), based on a helpful and supporting network of social relations, which, however, avoid "the clannishness of their Scottish relatives" (170). Close without being stifling, the Irish community transforms the city and turns "the quiet Dutch street into a noisy Irish one, where there was plenty of fun, and no little fighting" (171). The enjoyable and pleasing atmosphere of the Irish neighborhood stands out in comparison with the Scottish and the Dutch, thanks to a specific Irish peculiarity, what Cannon defines as the "natural gayety [that] whole ages of suffering have been unable 'to crush out' of the national heart" (171). Cannon does not forget the hardships suffered by the Irish both at home and as immigrants; however, in the 1850s the Irish still manage to experience the American city as an including place where they can live according to customs they brought over from home—"little Dublin" the name given to this part of Bickerton/Boston strongly suggests the attachment to their motherland—where conditions of life are decent, although humble, and where people filling the streets of "little Dublin" were seen not as outcasts or social and economical failures but as "the future men and women of America" (170).

Another striking text that adds a further perspective on the relation between the Irish immigrants and the American city is the novel *Old and New, or Taste Versus Fashion* published in 1862 by Marie Anne Madden, commonly referred to as Mrs Sadlier. Born in Ireland and emigrated first to Canada, in 1860 she moves to New York with her husband, manager of one of the most influential American Catholic publishing companies, and becomes "the best known Irish Catholic voice in American letters" (Fanning, *Irish Voice* 115). Her eight novels about Irish immigration to the New World published between 1850 and 1870 have all a didactic aim, they are "written for the express purpose of being useful to the young sons of my native land" (Sadlier, *William Burke* 1). The contrasts between right and wrong ways to be Irish and Catholic in America that she proposes in her fiction reveal her strict Irish and Catholic views at odds with the secular values of American society. They are, according to critics, her "practical advice to famine-era immigrants about how to negotiate between assimilation and ethnic and religious particularism in the New World" (Howes 140).

*Old and New* is the last of Sadlier's novels about Irish immigration to the New World and it entirely deals with social issues leaving religion aside. In the novel, the author presents the dangers and excesses of social success through the story of three Irish immigrant families, the Hacketts, Gallaghers and Fogartys who, in different ways, react to their making it into the upper class. The central symbol of the novel is the

house, an element that frequently recurs in Irish-American fiction and that Sadlier uses as the unifying structure of the events and as a device to introduce her characters. The book opens with the description of three houses, belonging to the three Irish families that “stood in one of the ‘up-town’ streets crossing the avenues” (9). The first of the three houses in a row belongs to Hackett, “a two-story brick house, which, in a less pretentious neighborhood, would have passed for a tolerably decent dwelling. Which rank it once indubitably held” (Sadlier, *Old and New* 19). The Hackett daughters consider their house too modest, “an old rookery of a place, old faded bricks, and common white shutters! and only two stories high!” (19). Their principal concern is that the house “wasn’t fit to be seen” (19) and that no one will come to visit them unwilling to enter a house with “the least bit of style about” (19). The inadequacy of their house becomes painfully evident when both Tom Gallagher and William Fogarty, respectively a butcher and a baker, decide to build impressive houses to give a public evidence of their economic success right in front of the less wealthy Hackett: “two brown-stone houses, one of three, and the other of no less than four stories, had provokingly reared themselves on either side, throwing our humble ‘two-story brick’ altogether into the shade” (9).

The girls of the three Irish families are set in contrast with Bertha von Wiegel, the daughter of two aristocrats, one German and the other Irish, who, like the other characters, is introduced through her house in chapter four and who, like her house testifies, stands for good taste, moral force and attachment to her origins. Bertha lives in an “old-fashioned residence some two miles up farther up town but much nearer the East River” (73). Anticipating Edith Wharton’s novels focusing on the contrasts between old New York aristocracy and the uncultured *nouveaux riches*, Sadlier depicts the “follies and extravagant pretensions” (479) of Irish people moving up in the social scale and she particularly pays attention to the obsession with fashionable clothes, parties and luxurious mansions of the middle-class ladies here represented by the Gallagher, Hackett and Fogarty girls.

In the construction of this social picture the city and its architectural elements play an important role. In this novel the Irish do no longer live in a single isolated neighborhood but they move around New York choosing the best area where to build their residences in accordance with the topographical and social changes of the urban space. Moreover, Bertha’s living in a house “evidently a mansion of some note in the old, old time” (76) that reminds the passer-by “of the good old times” (73) includes the Irish in the ancient New York aristocracy. As she abandons the forlorn crowd of starving illiterate immigrants, her novels widen the Irish experience in the New World, reminding the Irish presence in New York city since colonial times and allowing Irish immigrants to cross the suffocating borders of their urban ghettos.

The first responses of Irish immigrants to the American urban spaces here-outlined show how around the half of the nineteenth century those Irish immigrants did not conceive themselves as displaced persons in an alien and unfriendly environment. On the contrary, their colonization of American cities through the occupation of entire neighborhoods and their unlimited movement in the urban space witness developed skills in adaptation and a strong conviction of being part of that process that was building a new nation.

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VIRGINIA PIGNAGNOLI

NEW VOICES AND THE DIFFERENCE THEY (MAY) MAKE: DAVID SHIELDS'S  
REALITY HUNGER AND JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER'S TREE OF CODES

The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life.

Henry James, "The Art of Fiction"

How does a writer represent life in the twenty-first century? During the past two decades, the emergence of new technologies, which "temporarily destabilized the relations among existing media" (Thorburn and Jenkins 3), caused a debate concerning the changes they bring to print and to "the nature of what we now call the book" (Kelly). This paper focuses on two exemplary cases, David Shields's *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (2010) and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes* (2010), which deal with the renegotiation of their "nature" as books. What are the consequences generated by the visual, remix and mashup culture of the Internet, the file sharing model, the blogosphere, and the social networking websites on authorship and readership? While I am aware of the wide variety of possible answers to this question, my aim in this paper is to discuss a select few and to set the stage for further inquiries on the author-reader relationship in connection with genre expectations, multimodality, materiality and intertextuality.

In *Reality Hunger* and *Tree of Codes*, two features are primarily foregrounded: the mashup and the remix of preexisting works, and the use of paratextual devices, which makes the audience "aware of the spatiality of the print medium, a spatiality that is forgotten when print is considered to be nothing more than translation of spoken language" (Ryan 30). My analysis shows how these textual and paratextual elements may represent a literary direction toward those "new forms of participation and collaboration" that "converging culture is enabling" (Jenkins 245). In comparing Shields's *Reality Hunger* and Foer's *Tree of Codes*, these two features are vital in the construction and reception of the narratives. The following sketches my preliminary thoughts on the evolving relationship—or pact—between the author and the reader in our digital age.

*Reality Hunger* presents itself as a manifesto composed by an alphabetical list<sup>1</sup> of 618 numbered fragments of a couple of hundreds words each. The snippets are a collage made by several quotations taken from different authors—such as well known novelists, visual artists, painters, philosophers, journalists, poets, essayists, musicians, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> The titles of each chapter are worth listing: Overture, Mimesis, Books for People Who Find Television Too Slow, Trials by Google, Reality, Memory, Blur, Now, The reality-based Community, Hip-hop, Reality TV, Collage, In Praise of Brevity, Genre, Contradiction, Doubt, Thinking, Autobiography, Persona, DS, Alone, It Is Much More Important To Be Oneself Than Anything Else, Risk, Let Me Tell You What Your Book Is About, Manifesto, Coda.

Shields's friends, and family members—occasionally mixed with Shields's own words. The purpose of the manifesto is to declare a new *ars poetica*, to embrace a forming artistic movement whose key components are embedded in a challenging reading experience. The reading of the manifesto, a nonfictional narrative, is problematic in many ways.

A first observation concerns the tacit assumption about nonfiction, in which “the narrating-I’ is a reliable representative of the implied author” (Phelan 8). In *Reality Hunger* the reader is not aware of the quotations that have been cut and pasted in the fragments, both because the collaged snippets are not followed by the reference to their authors, and because the author does not provide a preface to guide the reader and to explain “why and how he should read the text” (Genette 238). Significantly, however, Shields offers what Genette considers a paratextual rarity: a postface. The postface, here titled “Appendix,” ultimately makes explicit the non-original sources of the fragments. The reader is informed that her uncertainty about the authorship of each snippet is not an incidental by-product, but a crucial tenet of Shields’ poetics, since, as he claims, “a major focus of *Reality Hunger* is appropriation and plagiarism and what these terms mean” (209).

The distinguishing feature of the manifesto, the remix/appropriation artifice, is finally revealed through the appendix that contains a numbered reference list of the various authors used preceded by a cautionary introduction to the references. Here, Shields clarifies that they are included only to avoid legal issues, and the reader would better served to dismiss the list, as this is a work of creative plagiarism. The reader is guided by a contradictory move made explicit by the author’s last warning: “Stop; don’t read any further” (209). The implied redundancy of the appendix is further emphasized by the dotted lines drawn on the side of the pages, guiding where to tear the page out. In this way, the author offers the reader the choice either to read the reference list or to reject it, and in this choice lies the challenge of the reading experience. Two reading paths are equally possible: to dismiss the reading list and perhaps to cut it out following the dotted line, or to go back to the fragments disassembling the collage to give the right reference to each quotation. And in so doing, the reading of the postface becomes more problematic than the reading of the manifesto itself.

A further textual cue lies in the lack of details provided in the list. In most cases, Shields’s references are not complete, but just a hint. For instance, fragment number 5 states: “It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel (minus the novel)” (6), and the reference Shields gives in the list is: “Roland Barthes, Barthes by Barthes (who else would be the author?)”; “minus the novel”; Micheal Dirda, “Whispers in the Darkness,” *Washington Post* (211). Moreover, the appropriated-authors listed in the appendix are mainly those same writers Shields is sharing similar thoughts on literature with and for whom he is writing his manifesto for (to name some: Phillip Lopate, John D’Agata, Jonathan Lethem, Geoff Dyer). As he explains in the first fragment: “My intent is to write the *ars poetica* for a burgeoning group of interrelated (but unconnected) artists in a multitude of forms and media ... who are breaking larger and larger chunks of ‘reality’ into their work” (3). The rawness of the references actually contains a veiled guide in how approaching *Reality Hunger*’s appendix: it is a sort of reading list for further readings. The knowledge-sharing model of Web 2.0 technologies is exemplified in the author’s need of sharing his “reading playlist” with the reader. In support of this idea, *Reality Hunger*’s fragments 37 and 42 belong to Kevin Kelly, who in 2006 anticipated the kind of mash-up narrative Shields creates in his manifesto. According to Kelly:

Once digitized, books can be unraveled into single pages or be reduced further, into snippets of a page. These snippets will be remixed into reordered books and virtual bookshelves. Just as the music audience now juggles and reorders songs into new albums (or “playlists,” as they are called in iTunes), the universal library will encourage the creation of virtual “bookshelves”—a collection of texts, some as short as a paragraph, others as long as entire books, that form a library shelf’s worth of specialized information. And as with music playlists, once created, these “bookshelves” will be published and swapped in the public commons. (n. p.)

*Reality Hunger* is a collection of snippets of other books and the appendix, to use Kelly’s term, becomes one of Shield’s “bookshelves” shared with his audience. The paratextual feature of the appendix becomes essential in the reading of *Reality Hunger*. It embodies the tension provoked by the lack of references in the snippets, the consequent desire to fulfill it with the source list, and the authorial warning not to do so. This tension characterizes the contradictory pact Shields wants to seal with the reader: on the one hand, the author is sharing his experience as a reader himself who cuts and pastes some quotations from various books and articles, and at the same time, he recommends his audience to cut out his “playlist.”

Shields’s contradictory attitude similarly appears in his claims for a new novel, a “literary collage,” in which the architecture of the nineteenth-century novel founded on character and plot, needs to be substituted with “theme and idea” (71) as he declares in his previous work *Enough About You: Notes Toward the New Autobiography* (2002). The manifesto’s poetics seems to favor the blurring of generic distinctions. As we read in fragment 184: “‘Fiction’/‘Nonfiction’ is an utterly useless distinction,” but this “useless distinction” becomes useful, for instance, in fragment 327: “The novel is dead. Long live the antinovel, built from scraps.” Yet, by declaring his own authorship for a book that is a patchwork of other books, Shields reveals that *Reality Hunger* on the one hand embodies Barthes’s idea of a text as a tissue of citations, and on the other, it symbolizes the idea of “free use” legitimized by new technologies. Therefore, the motif underlying the manifesto is perfectly conveyed by Barthes in “From Work to Text”:

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources,’ the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas. (160)

Shields refashions Barthes’s powerful claim combining the free use of past literature—from Augustine to Cicero and Dickinson passing through Woolf, Joyce, Borges, Sterne, Emerson, Goethe, Montaigne, Nietzsche, Yeats, Flaubert, Nabokov and many others—in the practice of remix.<sup>2</sup> In the continuous “reworking, recombining, and analyzing of already accumulated media material” (Manovich 126), remix is a major component of contemporary digital culture.

Thus the presence of the appendix produces a tension in the choice the reader must make about whether to read the references or not, but the manifesto challenges its readers on a different level too. The final discovery of the fragments’ unoriginality may trigger a feeling of betrayal. One counter argument is that despite the fragments lacking proximity to the reference, there are enough clues in the collage narrative itself to guide the reader towards a recognition of the mashup’s source. For instance, in fragment 261 the reader will find the quote “Art is theft,” but that same quote is also in one of the

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed history of the term see Lev Manovich, 2002.

manifesto's epigraphs, that attributes the quote to Picasso. However, neither the implicit clues nor the underlying poetics can do much against the feeling of betrayal the reader experiences when facing the fact that the author has sacrificed his "responsibility to the extratextual dimensions of [his] narrative on the altar of authorial purpose" (Phelan 8). And this betrayal from breaking the tacit assumptions of nonfictional narrative becomes most apparent when careful readers discover that the concluding sentence of the appendix, "Who own the words? Who own the music and the rest of our culture? We do—all of us—though not all of us know it yet. Reality cannot be copyrighted" (209) is indeed not Shields's, but William Gibson's, who is not cited. In fact, there are not quotation marks to highlight the use of a quote, ironically in a statement that serves to exonerate Shields's publishing house from legal issues surrounding plagiarism. Yet, this plagiarized phrase is emblematic of Shields's goal of engaging the readers through this mode of creative plagiarism.

The fan website version of the manifesto, called "Reality Hunger, Remixed: A representation of David Shields' Reality Hunger,"<sup>3</sup> exemplifies the reader's attempt "to remediate," to use Bolter and Grusing's terminology, the tension created by the no-references/reference-list. In this version, in fact, the source of each quotation is relocated close to the corresponding fragment. The existence of a fan version of Reality Hunger itself is then especially significant in terms of Jenkins's description of transmedia texts. According to Jenkins,

The encyclopedic ambitions of transmedia texts often results in what might be seen as gaps or excesses in the unfolding of the story: that is, they introduce potential plots which cannot be fully told or extra details which hint at more than can be revealed. Readers, thus, have a strong incentive to continue to elaborate on these story elements, working them over through their speculations, until they take on a life of their own. Fan fiction can be seen as an unauthorized expansion of these media franchises into new directions which reflect the reader's desire to "fill in the gaps" they have discovered in the commercially produced material. (n.p.)

If the unauthorized version of *Reality Hunger* reflects the reader's desire to fill in the gaps in Shields's remixed narrative, Foer's fourth book, *Tree of Codes*, materially recreates those gaps. The pages of *Tree of Codes* are physically cutout from an English language edition of Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* (1934). The reader is again challenged in her decision of how to approach a narrative, which, in *Tree of Codes* is presented through few scattered words on carved pages. The difficulty lies in the fact that before it becomes evident that it is possible to read the story flipping pages one by one (very carefully), the reader will read through the multiple holes of each carved-out page some of the words contained in the following ones. Comparing this evidently problematic reading process with my previous analysis of Shields's manifesto, at least four elements must be considered. First, Jonathan Safran Foer uses the same uncommon paratextual device used by Shields in *Reality Hunger*: the postface. Second, there are some differences in the way Shields's appendix and Foer's afterword influence the reception of the narrative. Third, in the imprint page of *Tree of Codes* the reader encounters the presence of an editorial note informing her that Foer's scattered words are not his but Schulz's, and what will follow is the new story carved out from *The Street of Crocodiles*. Fourth, in Foer's afterword—together with the imprint and the dedication pages, the only ones with a standard layout—the author reinforces his idea of

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<sup>3</sup> The web address is: <http://realityhunger.com/>

the homage he wants to pay to Bruno Schulz's "great book" (Foer 139) through the die cutting technique.

These elements show that, unlike the appendix in *Reality Hunger*, the purpose of Foer's afterword is not to guide the reading of *Tree of Codes* presenting a problematic choice. Moreover, once the "readability" of the story is established, the unfolding of the narrative does not create relevant tensions. Foer's postface is meant to provide context of his homage<sup>4</sup> to the Jewish writer Bruno Schultz and to the long tradition of writers who have exploited the possibility of the material page with typographical experiments—from the Italian Futurists to Tzara and the Dadaists, William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin, Queneau and the Oulipo group. In this sense, the reader is again invited to further readings, most explicitly of Schultz's *The Street of Crocodiles*, and more tactfully of past experimental literature. Finally, in *Tree of Codes* the gap filling activity works on a material level, foregrounding, as McHale (1987) points out, "the ontological tension between the book as object and the world of the text" (184). This orientation toward a "material" tension becomes even more remarkable considering that, in our digital age, *Tree of Codes* is impossible to digitize.

Despite the differences—*Reality Hunger* being more aligned with the predominant ideology of the digital world, in which "a mashup is more important than the sources who were mashed" (Lanier 79), and *Tree Of Codes*'s resisting this dominant belief—what I hope to have successfully pointed out in this article focusing on the paratextual elements of these two texts, is their authors' need to share their sources with the readers. On the one hand, today "the author is alive and kicking" (Korthals Altes 95), and on the other, knowledge-sharing is one of the main tropes of the participatory culture promoted by the emerging Web 2.0 technologies. Paratextual features, such as the ones discussed in this essay, help to recognize some of the ways in which new media reality is reflecting on contemporary authors shaping their narratives, and readers receiving them.

My attempt was aimed at depicting some of the differences new technologies may make on the narrative construction and reception of reality in early twenty-first century literature. The paratextual elements in *Tree Of Codes* and *Reality Hunger* provide multiple clues to understand the author-reader relationship in our digital age. My aim in the future is to elaborate on these ideas and develop further considerations on related concepts such as multimodality (see Gibbons, 2011; Nørgaard, 2009), materiality (Hayles, 2002; Wysocki, 2004) and the construction of authorial ethos (Amossy, 2001; Korthals Altes, 2010).

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<sup>4</sup> Bruno Schulz was assassinated by a Gestapo officer in 1942.

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FRANCESCO PONTUALE

*HOUSE OF LEAVES*, HOUSE OF LEAVES, HOUSE OF LEAVES:  
SAMENESS, DIFFERENCES, AND OLD PARADIGMS

I find it very nearly impossible to read a contemporary novel that presents itself unself-consciously as a novel, since it's not clear to me how such a book could convey what it feels like to be alive right now.

David Shields, *Reality Hunger*

This essay addresses Pia Masiero's description of our session, inviting us to probe "the ways in which new [American] authors interpret the challenge of writing in the twenty-first century while coping with the messiness of contemporary life." David Shields' publication of *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, in 2010, and his attack on the conventional novel is a case in point. The epigraph of my essay, taken from section (aphorism? entry? fragment?) #212 of Shields's book, openly betrays a mistrust in what it describes as the "unself-conscious novel," which in Shields's manifesto is also called "novel qua novel" (section #606), the "novelly novel" (section #592), or, as we might add, "the traditional novel," certainly not a very rigorous definition of the genre, but one that will suffice and whose referent, I assume, will be fairly comprehensible to the majority of the readers.

When I think about David Shields's *Reality Hunger* and Mark Z. Danielewski's debut novel, *House of Leaves*, on which my essay is focused, I infer one important rule about anything that has to do with difference: it is always possible to be different in different ways. It is, in fact, quite stunning to notice how, although both *Reality Hunger* and *House of Leaves* can certainly be regarded as non-traditional works, according to whatever category we might decide they belong, and although they both share so many concerns about some of the very same issues, such as, for instance, mimesis, originality, authenticity, appropriation, digitalization, and reproduction, their authors reach very different conclusions when they come to fiction writing and the novel as an art form. Shields, once also a fiction writer himself, describes *Reality Hunger* as the result of his "exhaustion with traditional literary practice" and as an explanation to himself of why "conventional fiction no longer has a purchase on [his] writing" (Albanese 30-31). On the other hand, throughout several of the interviews he released at the time of the publication of *House of Leaves*, Danielewski kept reiterating the "enormous possibilities" of the print-bound book and his confidence in the novel as a means which is still very capable of interpreting and shaping contemporary life at a historical moment in which it could appear to be superseded by other, mostly visual, media (Cottrell; McCaffery and Gregory).

Published in its printed form in the year 2000 by Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, after it had made its appearance on the Internet twice, first as a pdf file

and secondly in serialized installments, *House of Leaves* was greeted by Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory as “arguably the most impressive debut since Thomas Pynchon’s *V.* nearly forty years ago” (99). Its unusual, to say the least, page layout, the different typefaces for the different narratives it comprises, the use of colors and struck-out sentences, its often puzzling system of notation, the fact that it forces the readers to turn the book upside down or sideways or to go back and forth in order to be read, not to mention its more than two hundred (out of seven-hundred-nine) pages of “Appendices” with collages, drawings, photographs, poems, letters, various citations, and even an extensive “Index” of the entire novel were the features that attracted the attention of the first readers and commentators of *House of Leaves*, and that after more than a decade from its publication still make it so innovative and unique. In 2002 N. Katherine Hayles thus reacted: “*House of Leaves* recuperates the traditions of the print book—particularly the novel as a literary form—but the price it pays is a metamorphosis so profound that it becomes a new kind of form and artifact. It is an open question whether this transformation represents the rebirth of the novel or the beginning of the novel’s displacement by a hybrid discourse that as yet has no name” (“Saving the Subject” 781). My point here is that, in fact, we do have a name for such a “hybrid discourse” and that name is “novel,” as simple as that. *House of Leaves* belongs to a long line of antimimetic literary works that begins with *Tristram Shandy*, that is, together with the rise of the novel as a new literary genre. Since the outset, the novel has always been metamorphosing, adapting, mutating in its attempt to grasp and shape reality, even when that reality sealed off experience, as Walter Benjamin prophesized about modernity, modernism and the twentieth century, or when that reality exists in “an increasingly visually oriented, digitalized Internet era” (McCaffery and Gregory 98), as is the case for the early twenty-first century.

*House of Leaves* is a very ponderous, ingenious, and intense novel. It demands that the readers meander through its diverse paratextual apparatuses and extra-size pages and prompts (or bores, someone might say) them with very dense disquisitions on labyrinths, echo, mirrors, the uncanny, and endless references to and citations of scholarly sources partly authentic, often in their original languages, and partly altogether invented by Danielewski. The range of the different discourses *House of Leaves* draws on is also stunning: science, architecture, photography, painting, history, philosophy, psychology, and, above all, cinema; the many literary citations it flaunts are equally extensive and impressive: Shakespeare and the King James Bible, in the first place, but also, and just to name a few, Homer, Virgil, Milton, Baudelaire, Borges, and Edgar Allan Poe, whose presence looms large in the novel. Besides, or together with all this, *House of Leaves* presents elaborate and complex plotlines and all-round characters. Will Navidson, a renown photojournalist, his common-law wife and their two little children move to an old house, somewhere in Virginia, that will reveal itself larger in the inside than the outside and whose dimensions keep changing into a labyrinth with endless, enormous, dark, and ever shifting corridors, hallways, staircases, and rooms. The documentary film of the house and its explorations that Navidson carries out together with his brother, a close friend, and three professional spelunkers make up the documentary film “The Navidson Record,” which becomes the subject of the second narrative: the commentary to the film by an old, mysterious, solitary, and blind man called Zampanò. When Zampanò dies, his notes about the film fall into the hands of a young man in his mid-twenties, Johnny Truant, who works in a tattoo parlor in Los Angeles. Johnny becomes obsessed with Zampanò’s *The Navidson Record* which he

edits and glosses into a book called “House of Leaves” telling, at the same time, his own life as it is presently evolving.

What is *House of Leaves* really about? It is, first of all, as McCaffery and Gregory pointed out, “many different kinds of books rolled into one—horror novel ... psychological study ... send-up of academic criticism ... family saga ... metafictional and metaphysical speculation ... meditation on the nature of fear” (99-100). Further, as scholars as diverse as McCaffery and Gregory, N. Katherine Hayles (“Saving the Subject”), and Mark B. N. Hansen have all emphasized, it is a novel about how the technologies of reproduction—film, video, photography, sound—have transformed our subjectivities and our relation to reality. According to Hayles, “there is no reality independent of mediation” (“Saving the Subject” 602) in *House of Leaves*, and Hansen maintains that it “stages the futility of any efforts to anchor the event it recounts in a stable recorded form” (602) whether, I would add, that form is the result of technical recording or of writing: Johnny Truant who writes about Zampanò, who writes about Will Navidson and his family. Despite, or perhaps by virtue of, Danielewski’s confidence in the written word and the novel (Hansen maintains that *House of Leaves* “amounts to an assertion of the novel’s privilege within today’s complex media ecology” because it “demonstrates its own flexibility as a form of media capable of mimicking other media” [612]), what *House of Leaves* eventually purports, I believe, is a very bleak vision of the human capacity to grasp, make sense of, or record reality. The Navidsons’s house is grounded on a labyrinth that figuratively speaking swallows—something similar to a minotaur might inhabit its interior—those who try to explore and map it out and find themselves, instead, powerless in a terrorizing and disorienting darkness. The house becomes a metaphor that reverberates and expands in the labyrinthine structure of the text, the “house of (paper) leaves,” which in turn, and eventually, finds its analogue in the world itself, as we read in one of Zampanò’s poems collected in the appendices of the novel:

Little solace comes  
to those who grieve  
when thoughts keep drifting  
as walls keep shifting  
and this great blue world of ours  
seems a house of leaves  
moments before the wind. (Danielewski 563)

The Chinese-box structure affects both form and content. *House of Leaves*, “House of Leaves,” “house of leaves”: the novel, the text, and the world are all and somehow equally unfathomable.

Having said this, more than Danielewski’s world-view, what remains to be addressed is the novel’s formal features, which represent the most experimental aspects of *House of Leaves*, and to decide to what extent they in fact make a difference to fiction writing today and the near future, or if, instead, they are simply surface-level, ineffectual vagaries that have been the isolated and transitory experiments of and in a single novel.

Although I maintain that the word “novel” is still an apt definition of *House of Leaves*, Katherine Hayles is right in insisting, as she does in her by-now vast theoretical work, on the importance of Media-Specific Analysis which takes into account the text’s materiality and physical specificity, when more and more printed material is turned into electronic and digital documents (“Print Is Flat”). The necessity of a similar approach is confirmed by Jonathan Safran Foer. Talking about his *Tree of Codes*, he has recently

maintained: “books move in two directions, one toward digitized formats and one toward remembering what’s nice about the physicality of them” (Kachka). *House of Leaves* is certainly such a “physical” book that is required to be handled, turned upside down, tilted, and which consciously calls attention to its materiality and its being an artifact.

*House of Leaves* is also what Jessica Pressman has called the “networked novel” and (once again) Hayles a “Work as Assemblage, a cluster of related texts that quote, comment upon, amplify, and remediate one another” (“Translating Media” 278). *House of Leaves* is not only internally an assemblage of different narratives—Navidson’s, Zampanò’s, Truant’s—, materials—printed words, drawings, photographs, collages—, literary genres—essays, poems, letters—, but it is also externally the “central node,” according to Pressman, “in a network of multimedia, multiauthored forms” (107) that comprises: 1) a website—as late as October 2011, [houseofleaves.com](http://houseofleaves.com) has grown to almost thirty thousand registered members and counts more than 130.000 posts in several languages; 2) *The Whalstoe Letters*, originally a section in one of the appendices of *House of Leaves* that has been published separately, with some additions, by Danielewski; and 3) *Haunted*, the musical album by Danielewski’s sister whose stage name is Poe, and whose website and logo feature on the backcover of *House of Leaves*. Much likely not all of Danielewski’s colleagues, even younger ones, will opt for such a “networked” format for their fiction, but *House of Leaves* established a model that has already revealed itself important for how novels might be, and are presently produced and consumed.

“A print novel for the digital age, a book that privileges print while plugging into the digital network,” writes Pressman (107), *House of Leaves* openly alludes to and suggests the structure of a hypertext, from the most obvious of its features—the blue script adopted for the word “house” throughout the entire novel—to its divergent reading paths—the cross connections among its different parts to which it is liable, and the multi-processing of the diversified mass of information it requires. If the Internet is the most obvious influence on the structure and on some formal innovations of *House of Leaves*, these are also much affected by cinematic techniques together with a tradition of experimental writing that Danielewski openly identifies with (few, in fact) writers such as Laurence Sterne, Stephane Mallarmé, e. e. cummings, John Hollander, and B. S. Johnson (McCafferty and Gregory 106), and to what, for brevity, can be summed up with the generic name of “concrete” poetry, although, Danielewski in his interviews has never mentioned as a direct influence. For instance, both Chapter X and Chapter XII, that come after the most densely printed chapter in the entire novel (informally entitled “The Labyrinth”), employ the equivalent of what is slow motion in films. In the dark labyrinth, writes Zampanò, “boredom due to repetition, stretches time and space (Danielewski 167)” and so does the text in those two chapters with pages that contain few words or almost none. A verb like “snaps” is broken into three parts and printed over three pages (Danielewski 294-96). When the documentary film “The Navidson Record” runs out and leaves behind “a white screen” (Danielewski 309-11), we come to a totally blank page (Danielewski 310). By giving such spatial aspects to language, *House of Leaves* wants to match the space of its fictitious house and makes “concrete” what we are reading about, but such ruses can also be annoying, can appear over-ingenuous, and can be artistically weak.

It is, of course, impossible, if not wrong, to separate *House of Leaves*’s typography, page layout, visual apparatuses, and Chinese-box structure from the stories it tells, the characters it creates, the different stylistic registers it displays, but the latter seem to me

what makes *House of Leaves* such a powerful novel. The maze of footnotes is stunning for inventiveness and erudition; however, what will remain with me from *House of Leaves* is the way in which it creates and makes fear so resonant, Johnny Truant's angst, obsessions, and his tormented relationship with his mother, the painful letters she writes to her abandoned son from a mental institution, the forever shattered domestic lives of the Navidsons, the darkness that engulfs everything and everybody, and is so beautifully evoked in the very last paragraph of the novel when Will Navidson, who now resides in Dorset, Vermont, after the terrible experience of the "house," looks at his children going around for trick or treat on Halloween:

Tongues of grey ice cover the roads, candles flicker unevenly, and grownups gulp hot cider from styrofoam cups, always keeping watch over their sheep in wolves' clothing lest somebody disturb their pantomime. Each squeal and cry arrests a sip of warmth as parents everywhere immediately seek out these tiny forms wending their ways from porch to porch across great lakes of shadow.

Navidson does not close with the caramel covered face of a Casper the friendly ghost. He ends instead on what he knows is true and always will be true. Letting the parade pass from sight, he focuses on the empty road beyond, a pale curve vanishing into the woods where nothing moves and a street lamp flickers on and off until at last it flickers out and darkness sweeps in like a hand. (Danielewski 527-28)

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SIMONA PORRO

THE 'WASTE' OF THE AMERICAN DREAM  
IN E. L. DOCTOROW'S *THE BOOK OF DANIEL*

The present paper intends to offer a reading of E. L. Doctorow's historical novel *The Book of Daniel*, published in 1971, as a powerful denouncement of the decay of the American way of life, i.e. the array of ideals pertaining to the American dream.

Crucial to the analysis of this text is above all Doctorow's construction of history, eloquently expressed in the following excerpt from an interview given at the University of Heidelberg:

I think that history is made; it is composed. There is an objective event, but until it is construed, until it is evaluated, it does not exist as history. As Nietzsche said, you need meaning before you know what the fact is. ... Until you make ... an evaluation, and come to some judgment, unless you have a context of meaning, the event does not intelligently exist. Events in the past, too, don't totally exist until we construe them, and quite clearly, since they can only be recorded in words or pictures, the judgment that is made has far more leeway. ... Since history can be composed, you see, then you want to have as many people active in the composition as possible. A kind of democracy of perception. History is not so much a discipline as it is a source of our sense of ourselves, and therefore it is too important to be left to the historians and to the politicians, who are the two classes of people who use it all the time to reflect the values that they want to maintain or that they themselves represent. (184)

The author expresses a moral vision which emphasizes individual responsibility (Girgus 162) to history, to community and to one's native country. He advocates public participation in the historical reflection, i.e. a plurality of interpretations and perspectives on the past as a way to a better understanding of the present and the future, in his opinion a powerful antidote to undesirable totalitarianisms of any kind.

Given Doctorow's keen eye for history, it is no wonder that *The Book of Daniel*, his third novel, is centered on one of the most controversial American judicial cases. As he puts it in an eponymous essay, his novel is a "false document" (16)—the outcome of a typically Hawthornian approach to history (De Angelis 42)—modeled after the infamous ordeal of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the only US civilians ever to be executed for conspiracy to commit espionage in favor of the USSR during a time of war. In his text, the Rosenbergs are changed into Rochelle and Paul Isaacson, Jewish members of the American Communist party, who live in a modest little house in the Bronx with their two children: the firstborn Daniel and his sister Susan, five years his junior.

The story is narrated by Daniel, a 25-year-old Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University, and shaped into the subject of his dissertation. The text comprises three main narrative layers, always threatening to fly apart at the seams: Daniel's reconstruction of the tragic past of the Isaacson family up to the execution in 1953; his attempt at an analysis and interpretation of the Isaacson case thirteen years after the

couple's death; finally, a self-referential dimension focused on the process of history-writing, which results in the very book we keep in our hands (Farrant Bevilacqua 54).

Daniel's complex project is set in motion by the fate of his sister Susan. At 21, still psychologically imprisoned in the past and governed by the will to preserve her parents' memory, she embarks on a path to political activism in the New Left. Her commitment brings her a cruel disappointment in that the legacy of the Old Left, and the Isaacsons' martyrdom in particular, means nothing to the new generation of communists. The Old Left's progressive concept of history, and its willingness to work within the establishment to achieve the "golden age of Socialism" clashes with the new radicals' anti-progressive and apocalyptic attitude, and with their propensity to indulge "in a holistic fantasy of rapid and total change" (Farrant Bevilacqua 61).

Unable to move beyond the process of mourning for her destroyed family, Susan suffers a nervous breakdown and tries to take her own life by slashing her wrists in the restroom of a Howard Johnson's. A few days after the incident, Daniel finds a cardboard box in her car containing an old poster picture of their parents, which reminds him of the sibylline warning his sister whispered to him upon her hospitalization: "They are still fucking us. Goodbye Daniel. You get the picture" (9).

Seven months later, Susan dies from a "failure of analysis" (307). On the one hand, her total identification with the dead ones prevents her from moving on with her life: the idea that Paul and Rochelle's sacrifice may have been useless leads her to insanity and self-destruction. More importantly to the scope of the present paper, her death signifies the impossibility to continue living in a country characterized by murderous lies, intricate mysteries, and incessant plotting.

Susan's end urges Daniel to "get the picture," i.e. to begin an investigation into his parents' case. Through Daniel's attempt to peel off the various layers of history, Doctorow conducts a thorough examination of the set of principles, beliefs, and traditions that have come to be associated with an ideal image of the US, all of which have played a major role in defining the peculiar identity of the country in the world history. The tragic destiny of Daniel's whole family highlights the dramatic difference between the ideal and the real, by demonstrating that the US has failed to live up to its founding myth of democracy, rights, egalitarianism, freedom, and opportunity. In the figural universe of *The Book of Daniel*, America is depicted as a far cry from the "land of promise" (Hochschild 230) evoked in the rhetoric of the dream, appearing, on the contrary, to be a *locus* of conspiracy, discrimination, and power misuse.

Interestingly, as it has often been the case in Doctorow's literary production, the text employs the trope of waste—in the form of dust, dirt, and urban garbage—as a political allegory (Wutz 505-506), in this case, emphasizing the undercutting of democracy to the point of decay, and the repression and consequent exclusion of minority ethnic and political groups from the center of American society.

Daniel's quest for the truth entails the unveiling and the undermining of the ideologies to which he has been exposed since his childhood. He is brought up in an Old-left family, firmly loyal to the narrative of Marxism and the communist party: both of his parents put blind faith in the Marxist narrative of an inevitable historical progression towards a fair society and, as Carmichael asserts, they "both practice an ongoing and collective political analysis of contemporary life" (135) in which they involve their children. They point out to them "daily discrepancies between the American dream and the actual and social and economic conditions by constantly putting constructions upon formal education, religion, advertising and the media" (135).

For instance, Daniel's father engages in a war against what he thinks are the nefarious influences of culture in everyday life: "He had to exorcise the influences ... Did I ever wonder why my radio program had commercials? ... There were foods we didn't eat, like bananas, because they were the fruit of some notorious exploitation. There were companies whose products we boycotted because of their politics of labor history" (35).

Besides, Paul pedantically reads to his son the facts and figures of economic exploitation and slavery in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (36). In this light, Daniel portrays him as "someone who ran up and down history like a pianist playing his scales" (36), indiscriminately putting together all the historic inequities in order to show him that "everything that had happened was inevitable according the Marxian analysis" (36).

Interestingly, Paul's radicalism is closely intertwined with a devotion to the founding ideals of America, a typical trait of the Popular Front mentality of the late 1930s (Farrant Bevilacqua 59): "The implication of all the things he used to flagellate himself was that America wasn't democratic enough. He continued to be astonished, insulted, outraged, that it wasn't purer, freer, finer, more ideal" (41).

According to Paul Isaacson, the epitome of the failure of American democracy is Williams—the one and only black character present in the book—"a man destroyed by American Society because of his skin and never allowed to develop according to his inner worth" (44).

The superintendent of the Isaacsons' apartment building, Williams is known only by his last name. His life unfolds solely in one of the building's cellars, and is spent shoveling the coal that feeds the collective furnace. His dwelling is a dark catacomb replete with trash, dust and garbage, which in the text appear as the material and, as Wutz puts it, "color-coded equivalents of his position in society" (505).

William's subsurface, spectral existence of invisible man epitomizes the marginal position of African Americans and other minority groups in the US but also "the explosive potential of a political system of repression (which has been repressed from view itself) underneath a social facade of harmony" (Wutz 505-506). Furthermore, his condition becomes paradigmatic of a demonic reverse of the American dream, in other terms, a descending parable from the utopian City upon a Hill to a hellish existence in an underworld filled with waste where his discarded existence merges with garbage and becomes one with it:

The cellar smelled of ashes, of dust, of garbage, and of the green poison in the corners for the mice and roaches. There was also the smell of Williams, which filled the basement like its weather, which terrified him ... An overwhelming burning smell which proved that Williams ruled in the cellar, that even though his family lived in the house, the cellar belonged to Williams. It was the smell of his constant anger. (92)

Significantly, Daniel's narrative analysis of the espionage case surrounding his parents is also expressed with the trope of dust. Daniel's father, a radio repairman, listened routinely to cold war broadcasts and pokes "his soldering iron into the heart of the radio as if trying to repair the voice, trying to fix the errors of analysis and interpretation" (40). Then, he stabs it "in the tubes, like a primitive again, as if the machine was talking, as if to re-program the lie box" (40).

Ten-year-old Daniel, therefore, upon visiting his father's workplace, becomes fascinated by the dusty radios and starts working on them himself, "engrossed with the

mystery of the problem, the tracking down of the trouble inside the guts of a machine” (38). His job is “Vacuuming out the insides of the radios, clearing the dust of years out of a chassis with a small powerful vacuum that was like a flashlight” (39).

This activity can be construed as a symbolic reference to the historical, cultural, and political analysis undertaken by adult Daniel with this eponymous book. During his threefold mission as a historian, narrator, and investigator (Farrant Bevilacqua, 53-63), Daniel has to brush off the layers of oblivious dust that have accumulated on his parents’ legal case in order to finally shed light on the accusations formulated against them by the family friend Selig Mindish.

In the course of his investigation, Daniel interviews several experts and witnesses, both left- and right- wing, and peruses all the files available to him. Unfortunately, much of the evidence potentially useful to him has been withheld on national security grounds. Even his attempt to interview Selig Mindish goes awry: the man, now in his eighties, suffers from advanced senile dementia and cannot quench Daniel’s thirst for the truth. Daniel’s investigation eventually leads to a dead end, and the Isaacsons’ involvement in the espionage will remain a mystery to him.

The hermeneutic endeavor undertaken by Daniel reinforces the intertextual connection with his biblical namesake cleverly announced in the title of the novel. The prophet, a Jew in Babylon, is endowed with a prodigious ability to decipher the king’s dreams which helps him resist to the worst excesses of authority.

Notably, the first of the three epigraphs of the novel, taken from *Daniel* 3:4, comprises a reference to a “golden image” set up by king Nebuchadnezzar, which all Jews are bound to worship in order to avoid being cast into the “burning and fiery furnace.” This might suggest the fate of those who, like Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, challenge “the golden image of capitalism” (Hutcheon, 136). In this case, the biblical king is replaced by the American State, which sentences them to the electric chair, a modern version of the furnace.

In this light, it is no coincidence that the sad news of the Isaacsons’ arrest is brought to little Daniel and Susan by Williams, the janitor of the furnace:

He appeared in the doorway. I was frightened. He reached almost to the ceiling. He stood there looking at us with his murderous anger. He brought with him his menacing whisky smell. His eyes were red. ‘Your momma leave you here alone?’

‘No, she left us with Mrs Bittelman. But she went home to cook supper.’

‘Ain’t no one told you?’

‘What?’

‘Dear Jesus. It on the radio.’

At that moment the phone began to ring.

DIDN’T MY LORD DELIVER DANIEL?

– Paul Robeson. (132)

The narrator here quotes the title of a negro spiritual song by Paul Robeson, the chorus of which reads as follows: He delivered Daniel from de lion’s den / Jonah from de belly of de whale / An’ de Hebrew chillun from de fiery furnace / An’ why not every man.

If considered against the background of the novel’s plot, both of the rhetorical questions contained on the title and in the chorus appear imbued with irony, as the reader obviously knows all too well the tragic fate of Daniel’s “undelivered parents” (Hutcheon 136). What is more, the cellar furnace mentioned in connection with Williams inevitably reminds us of its biblical fiery counterpart, the punishment for all

those who, like the Isaacsons, openly defy the king's rule. Williams himself, excluded from democracy because of his skin color, is doomed to dwell in a chthonic realm replete with refuse and garbage, the epitome of the 'waste' of the American dream.

Another intriguing analogy between Daniel and the prophet is that none of them submits to the dominant ideology. The biblical Daniel remains faithful to his God even when he learns about king Darius' decree, according to which whoever prays or worships any god or sovereign besides him will be thrown into a pit with lions. Daniel refuses to comply and continues to pray to God three times a day. Accordingly, he is thrown into the pit, but he manages to survive an entire night with God's help.

The young Isaacson remains faithful to himself too, regardless of the influences of an era highly charged with social and political tension. After participating in the 1967 anti-war march on the Pentagon with the other radicals of the Movement, despite his exhilarating feeling of being for the first time in his life a part of a community, he realizes that he is 'different', i.e. that his unique background will always prevent him from abandoning himself to an ideology.

In the last of the three endings to the novel, set in 1967 at Columbia University during the takeover of the buildings by the radical students, Daniel is urged to close his book and leave the premises:

'That's right, man, move your ass, this building is officially closed.'

'Wait—'

'No wait, man, the time is now. ... Close the book, man, what's the matter with you, don't you know you're liberated?' (309)

Daniel's liberation signifies above all an emancipation from the burden of the family political commitment, which exerted an enormous pressure on him as a child and has caused a collective tragedy: not only his parents' execution but also his sister's death. Consequently, even if Daniel will never devote himself to the radical cause, he can nonetheless participate in it as a witness, as a detached observer endowed with the excellent ability to unveil the omnipresent corruptions of power.

Before complying with the young radicals' request to close his book, Daniel makes sure the readers know that he is headed to the Sundial to "see what is going down" (309). His will be, as E. L. Doctorow puts it in the Heidelberg interview, one set among the "thousands of eyes" (184) required to "generate as much witness as we possibly can. ... That is the way to truth and freedom" (186).

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FLORIANA PUGLISI

AGAINST THE GRAIN: RECONFIGURATION OF DEMOCRATIC AMERICA  
IN ROSMARIE WALDROP'S WORK

In the United States, democracy denotes a plurality of meanings. As Nicky Marsh points out, democratic rhetoric describes “U.S. nationalism and the expansionist aims of global capitalism” as well as “a participatory political culture of delivering social justice” (3). It relies on a series of distinctions—private/public, individual/collective, unity/difference, security/contingency—which has however limited such a participation (5). Consequently, as feminist critics have blamed notions of the public that is opposite to the domestic private and hence inaccessible to the female, contemporary experimental women poets like Susan Howe, Erica Hunt, and Lyn Hejinian among others, have recently questioned concepts of democracy relating to the public/private dichotomy and used their work to envisage alternatives (Marsh 7-10).

Though absent from Marsh's enquiry, Rosmarie Waldrop offers one more interesting viewpoint on the relationship between women and American democracy as well as on the import of domesticity. Domestic, as a matter of fact, is an ambivalent word meaning both related to the house, i.e. private, and related to the country, or national, i.e. public. Ironically, women would enjoy domesticity only as far as it does not cross into the national and political domain, where they are instead reduced to the paradoxical condition of native strangers. By rejecting exclusive meanings, on the other hand, Waldrop's work provides planes of intersection between private and public, familiar and foreign, women and nation, as far as history, politics and language are concerned.

Moving from Germany to the States in 1958, the author writes from the perspective of the outsider who does not belong to either country or language, but feels she is still “somewhere in mid-Atlantic!” (Cooperman). The dislocation of the immigrant and foreign speaker of English is further intensified by dislocation as a woman. Following Ludwig Wittgenstein's attack against the Law of Excluded Middle—by which something is either true or false—Waldrop enjoys exploring the *lawn* of excluded middle, i.e. women or the womb, “the empty center of the woman's body, a locus of fertility” (*Curves to the Apple* 97). The female gender then becomes a privileged site to undermine the validity of binary oppositions, “to subvert the authority, the closure, of logical propositions” (*Curves to the Apple* xi), and acknowledge other options. The American language, which she inhabits as a guest,<sup>1</sup> is one more fruitful “non-place” (*Ceci n'est pas Rosmarie* 79) to be employed in “the constructing of ‘counter-worlds’”

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<sup>1</sup> On the notions of language “(un)habitability” and “hospitality,” see Derrida and Crépon. Whether they describe maternal and/or national languages themselves as places of alienation from (vs. possession of) one's own idiom, Waldrop's actual exile from her mother tongue and location in-between languages—as speaker and translator (from German and French into English)—corroborates their argument. Like Braidotti's polyglot, she does not own any natural symbolic order but rather undermines the “ontological security that comes from familiarity with one linguistic site” (Braidotti 43).

(Cooperman). Through Waldrop's assault on syntax, reference and logic, it undergoes a process of deterritorialization, where it is de-familiarized, or, de-nationalized, and turned into a battleground for the clash of differences, for the renegotiation of identities and relations.

Dislocation and/or in-betweenness are at the heart of the poet's investigation of past and present America; as a European immigrant, she can trace connections between herself and early settlers; yet, as a woman, she knows that in "the shell games of archetypes" (*A Key* xx) she does not figure as a conqueror but as a conquered. In *Lawn of Excluded Middle*, she consequently explains: "Being a woman and without history, I wanted to explore how the grain of the world runs, hoping for backward and forward the way sentences breathe even this side of explanation" (*Curves to the Apple* 68). This is clearly achieved in a series of writings concerning American history and the theme of the European conquest: *shorter american memory* (1983), *A Form / of Taking / It All* (1990), *A Key into the Language of America* (1994), "Blindsight" (*Blindsight*, 2003), and "Sway-Backed Powerlines" (*Driven to Abstraction*, 2010). Although they all reflect the democratic ambiguity and tensions between private and public, unity and difference, mentioned at the beginning,<sup>2</sup> these conflicts are more explicitly reproduced in *A Form / of Taking / It All*,<sup>3</sup> which is paradigmatic of Waldrop's overall approach. Here, the enterprises of Columbus and Cortés and the geographical-geological explorations of Alexander von Humboldt are juxtaposed with an original Amy Lowell,<sup>4</sup> who visits the Mexican sites of the European conquest, and of the narrator herself, who combines formal concerns and references to 1980s US politics while visiting Washington, D.C. Public and private discourses intersect at the utmost degree, as the writer transgresses barriers of time, space, and syntax; as she relocates identities along trans- and/or post-national<sup>5</sup> boundaries, and a complicated pattern of genre/gender differences.

Though labeled as a novel on the cover page, the work resists classification. The first three parts ("A Form of Vertigo," "A Form of Memory," "A Form of Doubt") are prose sections relying on different formal devices: respectively, the stream of consciousness technique, the collage of historical materials, and first-person meditation; the last section ("Unpredicted Particles") is a poem combining America and the quantum by having Columbus discover both.<sup>6</sup> While references to domestic life qualify the narrator

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<sup>2</sup> *shorter american memory* is a collage of texts from Henry Beston's *American Memory* (1937); through the manipulation of its sources, it deconstructs the notion of homogeneous American identity created by national history. *A Key* explores the relationship between language, power, and gender, as its female voice claims her place in a history of male conquest. "Blindsight" focuses on supposedly minor subjects (woman and natives at the time of colonization) to explore how "every peripheral point has a capacity for being central" (*Blindsight* 76). "Sway-Backed Powerlines" implies comparisons between European voyages of discovery/conquest and U.S. invasion of Iraq, denouncing the nationalist, expansionist, and capitalist ideals embedded in American democratic discourse.

<sup>3</sup> Title-lines from Robert Creeley's "Here" (*Away*, 1976).

<sup>4</sup> In 1970, the Waldrops were in Paris on fellowships: Rosmarie on an "Alexander von Humboldt," her husband Keith on an "Amy Lowell." Explaining the origin of her book: "We decided we must write a work about their 'mystical marriage!'" (Retallack 372).

<sup>5</sup> Waldrop's characters are also representative of those socially marginal figures who, excluded from the construction of national identity, contest its social symbolic order by counter or "postnational" narratives that undermine coherence and stability. See Pease 3-6.

<sup>6</sup> The new physicist's concept of the universe as a web of interrelated elements, and its rejection of diagrams for purely mathematical formula, have great appeal for Waldrop, whose work explores the connections between disparate items ("what matters are not things but what happens between them," Retallack 349) and strives for a poetics deprived of images (metaphors and analogies).

as female and autobiographical, it is no longer the same voice as the lyrical mode, i.e. of "accepted paradigms of women's writing" (Freitag 34).<sup>7</sup> In line with the new configuration of the page, the narrative self provides one more point of intersection—between historical and fictional narratives, past and present, Europeans and Americans, North and South America, Washington, D.C., and Mexico City, conquerors and conquered, male and female—and a display of contents which rejects logic linearity and its product, namely a unidirectional narrative which serves the purposes of main/malestream ideology.

By joining threads of different stories, as a matter of fact, the author creates *interstices*—spaces in-between—which suggest new possibilities: fresh and flexible frames generated from the inclusion of the traditionally excluded middle. She disrupts the continuity of conventional narrative forms, for "any telling is falsification, is doing violence" (Retallack 342). Indeed, "the process is not so much 'telling' as questioning. This implies interruption. And in the gaps we might get hints of much that has been unsaid—but should be thought about" (Retallack 341). Consequently, connection and interruption are the two poles of Waldrop's compositional method.

Unfolding her design, she reconfigures identities of place and characters. First and foremost, she posits a territory that is not charted by physical, geographical or national boundaries, that has no beginning and no end: "All landmarks disappear" (3, 27); "Columbus set foot on the Bahamas, and the two hemispheres become alike" (11); von Humboldt "could see nothing but an expanse of water apparently boundless" (27). "Metaphor, muscles, telescopes, travelers" (17) are the instruments of connections by which poetry, anatomy, science, and travel can cross borders and join distances. They play a fundamental role, because "without our connecting them into the picture the dots are not even visible ... being real means having form" (17).

Columbus, Cortés, von Humboldt, Amy, and the narrator are therefore the many "dots" the reader has to connect to join in an ongoing exploration of the Americas. The voyages of Columbus and Cortés, which resulted in abuse, and of von Humboldt, who intended to provide all forms of measures, are counterbalanced by the less mastering attitudes of the female characters. Unlike early settlers, who domesticated land and natives, Amy moves "too fast, the boundaries slide" (6). She traces new routes, as the rotation of the earth's axis pushes her eastward, "undoing all research and exploration toward the west" (19). On the other hand, while she experiences the earth's motion around the sun, "she is truly lost, bits of naked flesh spinning off onto vast spaces ... at best caught in the large twilight zone that slips continually around the globe and abolishes all outsides" (19). Waldrop describes a cosmic movement that disintegrates still centers and peripheries, which reflect social and cultural hierarchies of power. Challenging this vision, Amy clearly aspires to a nomadic state as she tells of "her restlessness, her sudden desire to roam" (19).

According to Deleuze/Guattari and, later, Braidotti, nomadism does in fact imply an approach to the land that defies possession and exploitation. Amy's exploration cannot be depicted in terms of penetration and abuse, for her gender resists archetypal figuration. As a woman, however ambiguously homosexual, Amy would be on the side

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<sup>7</sup> The notion of female writing as the expression of personal experience through direct and accessible language was supported by feminist critics like Gilbert/Gubar, Showalter, Ostriker, and Juhasz; yet, while they contributed to enlarge the canon of women's literature, they remained detrimental to experimental women writers, who reject the convention of the lyrical self. See also Kinnahan 3-40, Vickery 3-20, and Simpson ix-xiv.

of the conquered, of the land that is conventionally feminized. Likewise, as the narrator tries to cast herself in the role of the European explorer, she cannot fit the archetype and eventually distorts it: she is only a “tottering, uncertain ... would-be-conqueror,” whose desire for the land—if sexual rhetoric is maintained—is “obscene” (58).

While roaming among the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the Washington Monument, the narrator finally conflates history, fiction, and the writing process. Her metatextual commentaries provide other “cracks and fissures” (72) to the linearity and continuity of the multiple narratives of the work. Fiction turns into “friction” (73) as new, startling elements are introduced. Her challenge to the “imperatives of narration” (55) is now extended to a national, political narrative which advocates and legitimizes violence in the name of (American) democracy. Waldrop alludes here to US involvement in Nicaragua against the communist Sandinista National Liberation Front; she hints at their mining of Nicaraguan harbors, after Sandinista Daniel Ortega Saavedra was elected president in 1984, and at Edgar Chamorro, who revealed that the crimes of his contra-revolutionary party had indeed been supported by the CIA (64).

Discerning a direct line between past and present ventures, European conquest and US ideological crossing of the southern frontiers (69), new patterns are devised, which oppose the “straight line” (73) of narration as well as invasion. A process of destabilization is implied by the vivid contrast between the vertical extension of Washington monuments—phallic symbols of male power—and the horizontal diffusion of water under the ground; solidification and fixity vs. fluidity, or, “instability and challenge” (58):

Did I need to let you take me up the Washington Monument to know that it’s a vertical world, power in the hands of men, a constant masturbation? ... But you know that erections don’t last, except in rigor mortis, the ground a problem, the water underneath. Cracks and fissures in the psychology of standing tall and hanging tough. ... And the dreams of conquest topple or, given the proximity of water, wobble, wilt, viscous, white, spilling over the ground. (72 )

Man’s work (“huge subfoundations” and/or “pumps” 58) is therefore necessary to bear the weight of public buildings and preserve national memory. To this purpose, the side story of the Coatlicue goddess statue is emblematic.<sup>8</sup> Threatening, despite the loss of its face, it is a “still center” (63), which reminds of the empty but fertile womb that the poet identifies with the excluded middle; “a demon, and a woman, man’s negative mirror” (67). Buried again and again under the will of (male) authorities, it suggests a disturbing correlation between official/national culture and the suppression of the female.

If we join the additional dots printed on the page, the goddess statue intersects with the water flowing under Washington, D.C.: finding a way up to the surface, the water does also threaten the stability of monuments and governmental buildings, i.e. male political power. In the end, the author explicitly denounces a situation where women still fail to benefit from social justice: if it took seventy years before the first claims for women’s suffrage were translated into the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, fifty more years have passed before the Equal Rights Amendment—sanctioning the legal equality of the sexes

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<sup>8</sup> The statue was found in Mexico City on August 13, 1970. Charles III had given it to the university; yet, to prevent idolatry, the professors had decided to have it buried. Antonio de León y Gama wrote a description which was later read by Alexander von Humboldt. Once in Mexico, the latter obtained permission to examine the statue, after which it was buried again (*A Form* 59-61).

and preventing discrimination—was sent from Congress to the States, to wait for ratification (76).

All these “frictions,” finally, are reflected in and conveyed by the use of collage, which involves the clash of different discourses, and the unit of the sentence, which is “made by coupling” (74). If language is one more system to measure and contain the world, to set a real process of discovery the writer needs to disrupt the linearity of grammar by pushing at the boundaries of syntax and sense:

Isogrammatical lines connecting the mean incidence of comparable parts of speech map the discourse of the world, I say. Against their average, extremes of sense and absence create the pleasure of fragments. ... I try to oblige, glue the shards, spread my legs, this time for balance, chemical, but also rebel, assemble my forces and start a zigzag march on the rules of grammar. ... A sentence that allows for confusion. Centrifugal. (57-58)

In conclusion, on the levels of both content and form, Waldrop's page records the settling and mapping of the American continent from the origins to the present: a process that produced and is producing hierarchies of power, centers of cultural and political life, where “ex-centricities”—here women, natives, communists—are excluded, marginalized, or silenced. Yet, at the same time, her page achieves an opposite process of dis-location and dis-orientation, as boundaries are erased and a new spatial configuration is constructed. To put it in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, she creates a kind of smooth and tactile space, where there is “neither horizon nor background, nor perspective, nor limit, neither outline or form nor center” (Deleuze/Guattari 583): a genuine democratic space with no insides and outsides; an all-inclusive space which delegitimizes the logic of the excluded middle. Hence Waldrop's rejection of closures, whether represented by conventional narration, narratives of American democracy and identity, literary genres, gender, continent, state and city boundaries: “To be open, as a book is only a book when open ... stretching outward in all directions and yet bounded at every intersection, centers unlimited, an orange in every word” (74).

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UMBERTO ROSSI

WASTE LANDS: TRASH AND THE AMERICAN MINDSCAPE  
IN SCIENCE-FICTION NARRATIVES

I would like to start from a passage of Philip K. Dick's September 4, 1973 letter to another writer, Stanislaw Lem, who—being Polish—needed (in Dick's opinion, at least) some information about the relation tying California and trash:

I think I can shed a little light on why my work contains some of the 'trash', as you put it. ... you see, Mr Lem, there is no culture here in California, only trash. And we who grew up here and live here and write here have nothing else to include as elements in our work; ... I mean it. The West Coast has no tradition, no dignity, no ethics—this is where that monster Richard Nixon grew up. How can one create novels based on this reality that do not contain trash ... one must work with the trash, pit it against itself ... This is a world of hamburger stands and Disneyland and freeways and gas stations and studios where they take the excess fat off you ... it's like living in an endless TV commercial ... (Dick, 297-98)

This should warn us about an unavoidable superimposition: waste is something material—annoyingly so, given all the problems it causes—but in fiction it is often a metaphor for the decadence of the western civilization.

The metaphoric use of trash comes from *The Waste Land* (1922). There the *waste* hints at medieval romance, at the *terre gaste* of the Arthurian legends, which mirrors the disablement of the Fisher King; but there is also urban waste, e.g. in the third section of the poem, "The Fire Sermon": "empty bottles, sandwich papers,/Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/Or other testimony of summer nights" (lines 177-79).

Material waste as an embodiment of a historical/existential condition easily migrated from high modernism to postmodernist fiction: we can find it in two of Thomas Pynchon's early short stories: "Low-Lands" (1960) and "The Secret Integration" (1964). The treatment of trash in these texts has already been discussed (Prezzavento 2003), and it is remarkably similar to Dick's own use of waste in some of his most important novels.

Waste unsurprisingly resurfaces in some science-fiction narratives of the 1970s. This was undoubtedly an age of ecological concern, culminating in President Carter's decision to install solar panels on the roof of the White House in 1979; the fact that those panels were removed by Ronald Reagan in 1986 tells us much about the change in environmental policies that took place in the Eighties.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in these science-fiction works waste is not just present for its metaphoric resonances: for example, it is pragmatically discussed in Ernest Callenbach's novel *Ecotopia* (1975). Its title has a lot to say about its content, and it is definitely representative of what the environmentalist mood or mindset was like in the mid-1970s.

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<sup>1</sup> The panels have been re-installed in 2003 by the Bush administration, but this environment-friendly move was kept hush-hush.

Callenbach describes an utopian, sustainable society thriving in the north-western corner of the USA, visited by a journalist twenty years after its secession. This bogus reportage is aimed at explaining the workings of the Ecotopian society, and it deals with trash in a matter-of-fact way. Here is what the Ecotopian minister of agriculture tells the reporter:

all food wastes, sewage and garbage were to be turned into organic fertilizer and applied to the land, where it would again enter into the food production cycle. Every Ecotopian household, thus, is required to compulsively sort all its garbage into compostable and recyclable categories, at what must be an enormous expenditure of personal effort; and expanded fleets of garbage trucks are also needed. (18)

The minister then boasts that

After seven years we were able to dispense with chemical fertilizers entirely. This was partly through sewage recycling, partly through garbage composting, partly through reliance on some novel nitrogen-fixing crops and crop rotation, and partly through methods of utilizing animal manure. ... our agriculture has reached an almost totally stable state, with more than 99 percent of our wastes being recycled. (19, 22)

We are quite far from Eliot: here garbage is plain trash, not the symbol of something else—maybe such a happy literal condition stemming from the fact that the Ecotopian society is not as decadent as ours. But one should beware of simplistic readings of apparently simple texts: Frederic Jameson has shown us (in “The Desire Called Utopia”) that Utopias are more than “plain” descriptions of desirable societies. Even *Ecotopia* has its interpretive pitfalls. Moreover, there is at least an act of interpretation that has been already accomplished when the novel begins: someone stopped seeing garbage as useless matter to be dumped (18), and envisioned trash as raw matter, as a resource. Once again, there is meaning in rubbish, if we only were able to read it.

The change of the political and cultural climate marked by the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 does not necessarily mean that waste disappeared. On the contrary, garbage abides. But the it is no more a matter of recycling: the Eighties seem to be more interested in reusing. This is what we find in the 1983 short story “Red Star, Winter Orbit,” written by William Gibson, probably the most important cyberpunk writer,<sup>2</sup> and Bruce Sterling, surely the best cyberpunk salesman. The story is set in an alternate historical course where the USSR have won the Afghanistan War (raging in 1983), and seized control of the Persian Gulf area and its oil reserves. This triggered an unstoppable decadence of the USA as a world power; on the other hand, the USSR could continue its space programme, reaching the Moon and then Mars and building a permanent orbital space station called Kosmograd.

Trash is however present in this story because the Party has decided that space exploration is not economically viable anymore and has reduced funding for the maintenance of Kosmograd. When the story begins, the space station is in such a state of decay that the few astronauts living there look more like hi-tech scavengers than the cutting edge of progress. The protagonist is an old man, a veteran of space, colonel Yuri Vasilevich Korolev, the first man on Mars, now a pathetic wreck maimed by a space accident. Korolev cannot leave the space station, because going back to Earth gravity would probably mean dying; but the space station is going to be abandoned by its crew.

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<sup>2</sup> Gibson’s aesthetics is one of “garage-sale-in-cyberspace” according to Paulk (486), hence intimately connected to the idea of reusing.

Only its military part will remain active—of course—but since its weapons can be operated remotely there is no more need of a crew. Yefremov, the anti-hero in the story, who is the political officer of the space station and a KGB man, says “Kosmograd was a dream, Colonel. A dream that failed. Like space, Colonel. We have no need to be here” (209).

What is left of the dream is that gigantic wreck, the space station, which is ultimately badly damaged when Tatjana, one of the pilots, hits the military section of Kosmograd with her Soyuz capsule, so that the military in it cannot strike the other capsules, used by the civilian crew of the station to desert. Only Korolev survives and remains on what is now a doomed heap of hi-tech garbage, as Kosmograd’s orbit has been perturbed (219), and what comes next is the “station’s final incandescent meeting with the upper atmosphere” (220). The first man on Mars is going to be incinerated, just like rubbish in an incinerator, but Gibson and Sterling devise a happy end for the story: a group of space scavengers, Americans coming from flying communes, living in sun-powered balloons (211), reach the space station by means of reused rockets. “What we do,” one of the squatters tells the astonished colonel, “we haul those surplus booster engines up the cables to the balloons, drop ’em, and fire ’em in midair” (221). Korolev thinks this reusing of old machines is insane, but the pragmatically American answer of the squatter is “Got us here, didn’t it?”

We might discuss the ending and underscore its ideological implications: the state-run technological effort fails (regardless of its being run by the Soviet Communist Party or the Federal government of the USA), but things can get done with a bottom-up approach. Space can be conquered when individuals (one might say entrepreneurs) endeavour to reach it and live there. In fact, the space squatters have occupied Kosmograd

[t]o live here. We can enlarge this thing, maybe build more. They said we’d never make it living in the balloons, but we were the only ones who could make them work. It was our one chance to get out here on our own. Who’d want to live out here for the sake of some government, some army brass, a bunch of pen-pushers? You have to want a frontier—want it in your bones, right? (221)

This is a specimen of cyberpunk ideology, that peculiar mix of anarchism and capitalism, traditional American individualism and a belief in unlimited growth which is unsurprisingly embodied in that arch-American word, *frontier*.

However, what the squatter really do is turning orbital trash—the doomed space station—into an inhabitable space; and, metaphorically speaking, the wreck called Kosmograd is science-fiction itself, space being one of its fundamental myths and topics. American sf firmly believed that space was the last frontier well before Kennedy and *Star Trek*: it was one of the tenets of the Golden Age of Sf in the 1940s. At the beginning of the story that American dream is dead, killed by the Soviet triumph in Afghanistan and the impoverishment of the United States; yet, the space squatters conjured up by Gibson and Sterling manage to resurrect it, to appropriate the Soviet dream of space expansion, thus resurrecting the American tradition of sf. The American space squatters are ready for “that big jump” which is the flight to the stars. What the oil crisis of 1973 turned into trash, the Reaganomics will turn into a living dream again. Or better, this is what cyberpunk fiction promised in its early stages, because getting back to space was not so easy after all, and Mars hasn’t been reached yet.

Whenever trash is part of the picture, whenever it is mentioned in American sf, what is at stake is a certain social and economic model, a faith or lack of faith in endless

growth, in the ideals embodied in the American Frontier (or better, a certain interpretation of that Frontier; I am well aware that that shifting line can be read in other ways, cf. Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*). The same occurs in another sf short story, R.A. Lafferty's "Scorner's Seat" (1973), which was published in the year of the first oil crisis in an anthology of ecological sf called *The Wounded Planet*, considered one of the milestones of this subgenre.

The story is set in the city state of Kyklopolis, which managed to survive a major, catastrophic ecological crisis known as the Panic Past. We are not told how many years have passed, but the inhabitants of Kyklopolis have only dim memories of the world before the ecological disaster. The city survives thanks to the ecological skills of its inhabitants: "It is one of those settlements of "Wheelies" and "Boaters" who are employed ... at the cleansing of certain river junctions; and cleansing them nearly as well as (and much cheaper than) can be done with the Purification Locks" (117).

The Kyklopolitans cleanse waters by using a mutant alga, the euglena, which in different times of the year causes eutrophication, consuming oxygen and increasing biomass, and then counters eutrophication, producing oxygen and decreasing biomass, "changing from an oxygen robber to an oxygen producer" (117), acting like a plant or an animal in the two different phases of its life: "*in one of its seasonable forms*, [it] chokes the waters completely, befouls the entire sewer and river system, crowds out almost all fish life with its robbing of the water of its oxygen" (133). Yet, in its other form, "the maleficent euglena becomes a beneficent euglena providing water, oxygen and food for a great burgeoning of fish, and the blockage cleanses itself" (133). Hence the cycle that is present in the very name of the city (from ancient Greek *kyklos*, "cycle"), the circular economy of this eco-compatible community.

But this is not—like Ecotopia—a utopian society. A strict birth control is enforced by the Scorner, "the autocrat, the absolute ruler" of Kyklopolis, whose name derives from the simple fact that

it is necessary that [he] is very stern, that he scorns all normal human sentiment. To keep the count constant required that the Scorner have right of life and death over the inhabitants. It required also that he have rights over the air and the water, over the much-spreading, over the land crops and the grazing, over the euglena and other algae, over all land and water plants and animals and fish, over the river and its divergencies. (122)

The fact that the Scorner stays in office just for a year does not mitigate his despotic power over the population of the eco-compatible city; suffice it to say that only when one of its inhabitants is close to death (and changes his or her surname into "Legacy," as John Laketurner in the story [120]), one of the women receives the "belly or birth blessing" (121) and becomes fertile (and quite soon pregnant). Though in the story all the female characters are eager to receive the belly blessing, this bespeaks a limited freedom of choice for women. Kyklopolis may be ecologically sustainable, but is definitely not democratic. The Scorner's seat is definitely not comfortable, if after 365 days the absolute ruler, "a solitary and impassioned man, too stern to bend" (136), collapses; yet this does not mean that the people of Kyklopolis are free to make any choice, because another Scorner is appointed, who will be "stern and inhuman and relentless for his one year" and then will "die with the terrible transmuting howl" (138).

It is highly meaningful, I suspect, that the howl of the collapsing Scorner is what triggers the transmutation by which the euglena alga turns into a means of purification, after having been an agent of eutrophication and pollution for six months. The Scorner

himself is part of the mechanism which governs the city, a totally senseless cycle of pollution and purification, described in the final chapter of the story:

The fact is that there is no regional pollution at all except that created on this special spot. After all, the Pottawatamie Purification Locks are only sixty kilometres upstream from Kyklopolis. The river runs clear from the locks and it runs clear to the very borders of Kyklopolis. And the air of the region has been clear for thirty years, excepting deliberate pollution in this one small area. The pollution in Kyklopolis is actually created and maintained by the massive toxic waste from (of all things) a bicycle factory which has a metallurgic operation so inefficient and of such poisonous throw-off (solid, liquid and vapour) as to stagger the imagination and to preclude any doubt that it is accidental. It isn't. (133)

Like the scum or muck in the sewers of Kyklopolis, the pollution in the air is removed by operators like Harker Skybroom, working on balloons (130-1), because "smog is only polluted air, and pollution is only an extreme form of fertility" (130). So the city itself produces the very pollution that it efficiently attempts to remove: such a cycle is both endless and pointless. The circularity of the treatment of waste, or trash, in this final city is so perfect that Lafferty describes it as a "Pollution-Purification rite"; there is no real need of it, but the Scorner, "the solitary and impassioned ruler of Kyklopolis is afraid to break the cycle on which that settlement is based". So its ecology, its economy, and its socio-political system are more ritual than practical: they are "an enacted struggle" and their "elements are not real, they are surreal" (133). Thanks to technological process, the pollution of Kyklopolis has come to an end; yet, the city continues with its stern policy of birth control and cyclical pollution and purification (or depuration).

Surely this makes the treatment of waste in this story quite different from what we find in Callenbach's utopian novel and in Sterling and Gibson's cyberpunk tale of death and regeneration. Lafferty's attitude is ironic and one wonders whether he is expressing some twisted form of eco-scepticism. The unbending despotic rule of the Scorner might be read as an anamorphic rendering of the fanaticism of radical ecologists. Had not Callenbach's *Ecotopia* been published two years after Lafferty's story, one could suspect that the author of "Scorner's Seat" is mocking that novel and the utopian society it outlines.

Yet, I do believe that there is another, less reactionary, subtler and more productive interpretation of waste and recycling in "Scorner's Seat." The very fact that Raphael Aloysius Lafferty (1914-2002) took part in the *Wounded Planet* anthology tells us that he took environmental issues quite seriously. Actually, the paralysed recycling society depicted in "Scorner's Seat," a society that is unable to adapt to the changed environmental situation, in which the eco-catastrophe has been averted, can be read as an anamorphic image of our society based on globalized capitalism and unlimited growth, on consumerism and consumption, on fossil fuels and a shopping-mall sociality; the "close-built town of Kyklopolis" (138) (the city is surrounded by a deadly barrier that only few can cross harmlessly) is an image of our civilization, imprisoned in a spiralling cycle of hyper-production, hyper-consumption, unemployment and growing debt. The muck endlessly and pointlessly recycled in the unnecessary Kyklopolis waste disposal system may then be an anamorphic image of the goods we endlessly and pointlessly produce and circulate; the Scorner may be an image of another ruler, as unbending and despotic Richard Nixon, but also a foreshadowing of the less and less democratic ruling elites that govern Western countries today (democratically elected with funds from big corporations that cannot be disappointed once the candidate they

support is on power). Rulers that dare not really change anything, with the possible exception of little adjustments whose effectiveness is dubious to say the least. Hence, what Lafferty says of Kyklopolis and its ritualistic system of pollution and depuration also applies to our world of constant (in some places increasing) pollution and very little depuration.

So, when Lafferty says that pollution in Kyklopolis is stubbornly and insanely maintained, one has a disquieting and persistent feeling that such a remark can all too easily be applied to our world, to our global *polis*. There is no element of deliberation in our environmental disaster, yet it is stubbornly and insanely maintained.

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CARLA SASSI

GLOCALISING DEMOCRACY: THE QUEST FOR TRUTH AND JUSTICE  
IN *LOCKERBIE 103* BY DES DILLON

Looking back, if the police investigation had been an entirely Scottish affair, with unrestricted access to all available information, without interference from outside, perhaps the result could have been different. ... Instead, from the beginning, the investigation, and what were to become the most important aspects of the prosecution case against al-Megrahi, were hijacked by outsiders.

Gareth Peirce, Human Rights Lawyer

The present essay<sup>1</sup> is located within the broader context of recent critical attempts to reclaim the “local” in the discourse of cosmopolitanism, and purports to investigate local and global f(r)ictions of truth and justice as represented in a play about the Lockerbie case by Scottish writer Des Dillon.<sup>2</sup> In fact, while media have largely focused on the international legal and political negotiations between Lybia, the US and UK, the case has indeed had a complex and important “local” side, represented by Scotland’s political stance—a highly ambiguous one, characterised both by formal adherence to the UK institutional politics (Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security, in fact, remain beyond the power of the devolved Scottish Parliament, under the terms of the Scotland Act 1998) and by the articulation of an independent legal stance (as Justice has been devolved since the 1707 Union).

The Lockerbie case, as we shall see, precariously balanced between Scots law, UK and international law, between conflicting visions of justice and truth, and arguably between conflicting political interests (with the US, the UK, Lybia and possibly a number of Middle-Eastern countries involved in the identification of the culprit and in the setting up of the trial), has possibly fully revealed for the first time in the UK legal history the potential overlapping and friction between Scotland’s political role as a nation-member of the UK and as an independent legal entity. From a wider perspective, the case also fascinatingly maps out a complex field of tensions between the global and the local in relation to demands for justice and democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> *Lockerbie 103* was commissioned to Dillon by an English theatre company, The Ashton Group, and was premiered at Forum 28, in Barrow, England, on 20th February 2003. It then went on national tour throughout the UK. In Scotland it was staged at the Edinburgh Traverse Theatre in March the same year. The present discussion, however, for sake of convenience, will refer to the only published edition of the playscript, the revised 2010 Kindle edition.

The term “local” will be used here to designate interchangeably a physically-bound place (the village of Lockerbie and the county of Dumfriesshire, Scotland, where the Pan Am Flight 103 crashed on December 21st 1988), a geopolitically peripheral community or more simply a national community (Scotland, within the UK), while the term “global” will refer, as in current social-scientific usage, to world or transnational events and realities but also to corporations which straddle the whole world (or a large part of it), implementing virtually uniform strategies (represented, in this context, by the UK-US entente). The term local will therefore always imply the existence of an imagined or real community, whereas the term global will indicate either a process of negotiation/dialogue among diverse communities or, in worse scenarios, the prevarication of a single, privileged, trans/national political entity.

I will briefly consider the role of the local in relation to demands for global justice and briefly deal with the “local” implications of the Lockerbie case as a premise to my investigation of Dillon’s text.

### *Cosmopolitanism and global justice: local implications*

The debate on cosmopolitanism is wide and complex and an exhaustive presentation of its many nuances and gradations is certainly beyond the scope of the present essay. However, some recent re-conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism as a markedly *moral* enterprise are particularly relevant in the present context: drawing on the strictly etymological meaning of cosmopolitan (“citizen of the world”), they prioritise a moral commitment to helping human beings, insisting on the duty to respect and promote basic human rights and justice worldwide. Along these lines, cosmopolitanism has been re-defined as a “*moral* claim about the scope of *justice*” (Tan 12), or an effort to view questions of justice from the lens of the world (Pogge), challenging us to extend our moral obligations well beyond those to whom “we are related by ties of kith and kind” (Appiah xv). However, if moral cosmopolitanism has often been deemed incompatible with nationalism and patriotism, or with any form of local commitment, seen as obstacles to the realization of global justice, a number of scholars have aimed at a reconciliation between such terms, either arguing that “cosmopolitan justice can allow for special concern and obligations on nationalistic and patriotic grounds, and that it can do so without forfeiting the cosmopolitan commitment to global egalitarianism” (Tan ix), or maintaining that global democracy is best achieved through the strengthening of local and nationally based democratic citizenship (Thompson), or even seeing patriotic sentiment as the basis for global concern (Nussbaum). By way of simplification, what all these scholars claim or imply is that nation- or local-oriented sentiments indeed represent the necessary ground for attaining global justice.

### *The Lockerbie case and Scots Law*

Scotland has been a stateless nation and part of the UK since the 1707 Union of Parliaments, and yet it has retained its own independent legal system, sharing a legislature with the rest of the UK. Scots Law is best described as a pluralistic or hybrid system: it has a basis in Roman law, combining features of both uncodified Civil law and common law, it is therefore quite distinct from the English system. After its restoration in 1999, the Scottish Parliament can pass laws within its areas of legislative

competence: the Westminster Parliament remains the “sovereign legislature,” retaining legislative power in relation to Scotland, while the Scottish Parliament sets all the laws affecting the domestic affairs of Scotland.

It is partly against this complex legal background that the Lockerbie case developed. As the aircraft crashed in Scottish territory (resulting in the death of 259 passengers and crew and 11 residents of Lockerbie) the case, culminating in the controversial release of Megrahi in 2009, was entirely heard under Scots Law. And even though, in accordance with international law requirements, enquiries were carried out by both British and American authorities, in the early stages both the Lockerbie residents and the local police were actively involved in the investigations. The friction between the two distinct groups of investigators has been recorded and even denounced by several observers, who have accused the CIA in particular of monopolising the enquiry and even tampering with evidence (Ashton and Ferguson; Peirce 27-50).

On 14 November 1991 charges were laid by the Lord Advocate of Scotland against two Libyan nationals, Megrahi and Fhimah, who were said to be officials of Libyan Arab Airlines and part of Libya's intelligence service. The offences charged were conspiracy to murder, murder and offences under the Aviation Security Act 1982. Megrahi (the first accused) was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison in a Scottish jail, eligible for parole after 20 years. This outcome was highly controversial. Both the enquiries and the setting up of the trial had taken place in a climate of international tension. While three governments—British, us and French—had eventually all pointed to the involvement of Libyan nationals and requested the co-operation of Libya, many observers had identified in Iran a more likely mastermind of the bombing, seen as a retaliation to the US shooting down of an Iran Air flight in July 1988, killing 290. According to the same theory the blame had been eventually shifted onto Libya when the US and its European allies needed to improve relations with Iran and Syria after the Gulf war against Iraq. Significantly, the surrender of the accused was preceded by a long legal and political negotiation, including sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council and an application by Libya to the International Court of Justice.

A discussion of the complex history of the Lockerbie trial<sup>3</sup> is outside the scope of the present paper, yet it is worthwhile to point out here that such trial “is unique in a number of ways, and even seen exclusively from the standpoint of Scots criminal law and procedure it presents several special aspects” (Davidson 171). This was in fact the first criminal trial under Scots Law to be held outside Scotland—at Camp Zeist, in the Netherlands—and it was also untypical in that, while Scottish murder trials are ordinarily conducted under solemn procedure (i.e. a judge sitting with a jury of 15 lay persons drawn randomly from the electoral roll, whose function is to decide upon a verdict), this was conducted without a jury, with the court deciding all questions that would normally be addressed by a jury.

The long list of exceptions identified by Davidson may be (and indeed has been) either interpreted as the necessary adaptation of the national procedure to international law requirements, or as the outcome of an artful manipulation from external powers (the US in particular) aiming to curb the authority of an independent (but vulnerable insofar

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<sup>3</sup> For further information on the setting up and the development of the trial see the website edited by Robert Black and Ian Ferguson: <<http://web.archive.org/web/20020524233852/http://www.thelockerbietrial.com/>>. One of the “architects” of the Camp Zeist trial, Black is Professor Emeritus of Scots Law at the University of Edinburgh.

as not backed up by an independent state) legal system. The de-territorialisation of the trial and the ruling out of the national jury in particular may be seen under either perspective.

What perhaps matters most here, however, is that the case uniquely embodies and stages a dramatic field of tensions between local and global visions and practices of (legal) justice. The same set of tensions is represented in their complex interplay in Dillon's *Lockerbie 103*.

### *The Lockerbie trial revisioned*

*Lockerbie 103* is the outcome of a collaboration between Dillon and investigative journalists Ashton and Ferguson, authors of *Cover-up of Convenience*—an impressive collection of information and data casting doubt on the official investigation and subsequent trial and ascribing the responsibility for the bombing to a Syrian-based Palestinian group carrying out a revenge attack on behalf of the Iranian government, in response to the shooting down of an Iranian passenger jet in 1988.<sup>4</sup> It is worthwhile to point out that both Dillon and Ferguson are native to Dumfries and Galloway, the region where Lockerbie is located, which no doubt accounts for the partly “local” accent of their different, and yet intersecting quests for truth and justice.

The play is set in a bed-and-breakfast in Lockerbie some time after the release of Megrahi, and features three fictional characters: Annie McDowell, the owner of the bed-and-breakfast and a local; Ali, a Middle-Eastern journalist who has investigated the case in the early stages under CIA orders and is now hiding away from CIA itself as his findings would subvert the official truth of the trial; Michael Vogler, an American young man who lost his mother in the Lockerbie disaster and is embittered by the Scottish government's decision to release Megrahi. Some of the real protagonists of the Lockerbie case are also evoked in the play, impersonated by the three characters on the stage who briefly ‘metamorphose’ into them speaking in their voices—these include Lord Sutherland (one of the Camp Zeist judges), Lockerbie witnesses and local radio/TV broadcasters.

*Lockerbie 103* dramatises both the agenda of *Cover-up of Convenience* (i.e. demonstrating Megrahi's innocence and unravelling the CIA-centred plot that brought to his imprisonment) and some of the key information contained in it. Yet the play represents also a quite distinct project, as it concentrates the “simple” quest for factual truth of the journalistic investigation into a complex quest for emotional *and* factual truth through a local re-contextualisation of the Lockerbie trial. The play, in fact, implicitly stages an ethical re-vision of the trial by significantly re-territorialising it (both the play's “inquiry” and “verdict” symbolically unfold in Lockerbie), retrieving the voices of those whose lives were deeply and directly affected by the bombing (repressed or marginalised by the official trial), with the three characters acting as investigators, witnesses and judges at the same time, and by restoring the jury (absent in Camp Zeist)—a role opened up “democratically” to all spectators. Furthermore, as

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<sup>4</sup> The book raised much interest in the media. It was positively reviewed, among others, on *The Guardian*, 7 June 2011 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2011/jun/17/politics>). It also inspired a Dutch television documentary, “Lockerbie Revisited” (2009), directed by Gideon Levy, awarded the “Prix Europa” as the Best Television Current Affairs Programme of the Year in 2009 (<http://tegenlicht.vpro.nl/afleveringen/2008-2009/lockerbie-revisited.html>).

indeed “certain ethical, political, and legal values manifest themselves or operate only in the medium of narratives by which a culture or nation defines itself” (Weisberg 63), such re-vision, as most of Dillon’s work, is not only ethically and politically charged but is also articulated from a firmly Scottish/local stance. In the play Annie’s testimony stands no doubt as a centrally ‘authentic’ local voice. Her demotic Scots and down-to-earthness signal here a sense of natural justice, along the lines of a (somewhat problematic) literary trope of much modern and contemporary Scottish literature. When she relates that, hours after the crash, Lockerbie was invaded by CIA agents, searching the debris and interfering with the Dumfriesshire police and the local people’s investigations, she is confronted by Michael’s contemptuous disbelief. Her reply is emphatically “local”—both factually and emotionally charged:

Listen son, if there is a dog shites round here everybody knows about it. Lockerbie was crawlin wi CIA within two hours of the crash. ... They even had them big daft raincoats ye see in the pictures. Like frocks. If ye ask me they looked like fuckin eejits marching up and down our main street. They thought they were invisible. An they thought we were daft ... (loc. 121)

Annie later observes that “The CIA should hire a few auld wimmen from Dumfries an Galloway. Ye can’t keep secrets from us” (loc. 127)—a statement that unwittingly chimes with Peirce’s praise of the integrity of “the smallest force in the UK, the Dumfriesshire police, supported by the selfless help and acute observations of the people of Lockerbie itself,” (28) and which reverberates the central notion that a local perspective is less subject to manipulation, either by distant centres of political power or by the media hyperreality, and therefore valuably autonomous. She, like other members of her small community, is represented as able “to speak truth to power”—to dissent from the superficial, the ideological and the official, uttering what needs to be said in the face of arrogant mystifications.

And yet Dillon’s local re-contextualization is inextricably intertwined with a markedly cosmopolitan outlook as well as with a central concern with global justice, realized in the play through the negotiation between Ali—the Middle Eastern detective and leading narrator, who unravels authoritatively the plot set up by a US-centered global “empire”—and Michael, the American victim who gradually shifts from the official ‘abstract’ truth promoted by the global media to the factual and emotional truth reconstructed by Ali and Annie. It is indeed this negotiation that takes centre-stage in the play—a quasi-forensic rhetorical tour de force aimed at winning the favor of the jury-audience.

The local and the global perspectives remain in fact interdependent throughout the play: if the three characters’ lives are all deeply upset and shaped by global events/forces, and if they all set off to re-establish some form of global justice, they do so from a specifically “local” stance, as even Ali and Michael are portrayed in their specificity of “common” individuals and in their stubbornly independent resistance to global empire. Ali and Annie (and even Michael at the end of the play) seem indeed to represent the militant ‘minor-ness’ advocated by Homi Bhabha (via W.E.B. Du Bois) and described by Gandhi “as a subset of *ethics*, with the ‘majoritarian position’ as a contrasting correlative of hegemonic or ‘power’ politics” (36), or even that “common-ness” (the outcome of “experiences of suffering or oppression that strip one of value altogether, rendering their subject unexceptional, ordinary, unremarkable, unworthy of note...”) that in Gandhi’s vision may, if “actively cultivated in the name of democracy,” represent a powerfully transformative project (33).

Finally, there is no more powerful figuration in the play than its quintessentially “local” setting—a room in Annie’s bed-and-breakfast, a room which nonetheless opens up to the world, *becomes* the world, as it collects and reverberates the scattered testimonies on the case. It is indeed the setting that condenses most aptly the play’s revision of the global as a transnational network of local nodes: Dillon’s characters mediate constantly between their aspirations for global justice and their “local” loyalties, rooting such aspirations in ‘local’ notions and perceptions of identity, community, justice.

By way of conclusion: Tan demonstrates how “cosmopolitanism understood as a moral claim and as a claim about justice is not necessarily at odds with nationalism” (93), insofar as “it is within the context of a national culture that the core liberal values of individual autonomy and self-identity, social justice, and democracy are best realised” (85). He observes: “Indeed, as we can recall, many liberals have argued that certain moral cosmopolitan goals are *best* achieved in the context of the national community, rather than in the context of a global state” (95). Within this same framework, *Lockerbie 103* goes a long way to re-vision the ideal of global justice as based on a cosmopolitan-oriented liberal nationalism, and the concept of the local as inextricably bound to the global (rather than romanticizing it as the site of anti-hegemonic resistance par excellence). This may also be said to provide a timely reconceptualisation of democracy as a glocal rather than as a nationally rooted ideal, or as a prospect that can be realized exclusively through global action.

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CRISTINA SCATAMACCHIA

ELIZA JANE POITEVENT HOLBROOK NICHOLSON  
AND THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

American journalist Eliza Jane Poitevent Holbrook Nicholson, generally known as Eliza Nicholson (1843-1896), was an influential figure and a leading pioneer in the American daily press during the last decades of the nineteenth century. She was the first woman to both publish and edit a major metropolitan newspaper, the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, which she ran successfully for twenty years, from 1876 until her death in 1896. She held a unique position in the male-dominated world of journalism. In the 1870s, in fact, fresh opportunities opened to women journalists in the American press, but most of them were allowed to contribute only to the 'women's pages'. Others wrote for feminist publications as well as for women's magazines, editing and publishing some of them. However no woman journalist, except Nicholson, was the editor and publisher of an important newspaper (Gilley 233). The only other influential woman publisher was Miriam Leslie, who inherited several magazines but no daily publications from her husband in 1880 (Okker 28-31).

Nicholson was a real forerunner and ground breaker. After her death more than thirty years elapsed before another woman was able to play a similar role as owner-editor of a major newspaper: she was Cissy Patterson, who came from a wealthy press family and managed the *Washington Times-Herald*, turning it into the largest-circulation daily in that city. It should also be underlined that in spite of the great advances and achievements of American women journalists from the late nineteenth century to the present, very few of them have become publishers and editors of major daily newspapers. Therefore Nicholson's role as a publisher is comparable to Katharine Graham's, the courageous owner of the *Washington Post* whose reporters uncovered the Watergate scandal in 1972; and her arrival at the helm of the *Picayune* marked a turning point for women in journalism similar to the recent nomination of Jill Abramson as the new executive editor of the *New York Times*, the first woman in its 160 years of history. However, while in her times Nicholson was a powerful and unconventional woman who eventually became a celebrity, today she is not widely remembered in the United States, even though several historical essays about her life and her work have appeared over the years, and in Louisiana she is still an honored and revered figure. On the other side of the Atlantic, including Italy, she is totally unknown.

This paper is not a comprehensive study of Nicholson's life since it considers only a specific aspect of her work as a newspaper editor and a publisher: it focuses on the making of American cities, stressing gendered and ethnic transformations. In this context, I argue that: 1) Through her newspaper Nicholson contributed to shaping the modern urban identity of New Orleans. She advocated civic reforms and public works that enhanced community welfare. Thanks to her work, the *Picayune* became a major

cultural and political force in Louisiana. 2) At the same time Nicholson was influential in shaping a new representation of Southern female identity. She promoted women's careers in journalism, and more generally favored better educational and working opportunities for women. As a successful and respected businesswoman, she was a living example of this new Southern female identity and became a role model for aspiring professional women journalists.

Born in Mississippi in 1843, she grew up on a plantation near the Louisiana border in a very isolated area (Brady 1, Wicks 1-3). Like many Southern girls, she was sent to a female academy where she received what she later described as a "useless education...without any solid qualifications" (Harrison 25, Schlipp and Murphy 95-96). Early in her life she became famous for her poems, which appeared after the Civil War in several New York and New Orleans newspapers under the pen name of Pearl Rivers (Frois 113). When the *Picayune* offered her a job as its literary editor in 1870, she became the first Louisiana woman employed in the staff of a daily newspaper as well as one of the very first women journalists in the Southern states. Soon afterwards she married the owner-editor of the newspaper, colonel Alva Holbrook, and when he died in 1876 she inherited his paper.

The *Picayune*, however, was deeply in debt, owing creditors almost 80.000 dollars. Rather than handing over the newspaper and returning to her family in Mississippi, she decided to edit and publish it herself (O'Loughlin 1). But when she informed the staff that she would run the paper, several journalists protested because they did not want to work under a woman. She fired them, proving to be a tough-minded executive ("Eliza Poitevent Blazed"). With the help of the business manager George Nicholson, whom she later married, she was able to pay off the debts and transform the *Picayune* from a provincial newspaper into a modern, influential and highly successful metropolitan daily. Nicholson showed herself a brilliant manager and a powerful publisher, and thus she succeeded in dispelling the doubts about her editorial leadership that had been raised by some of the staff, and in earning the respect of the men who worked for the *Picayune* as well as the journalists and editors of other publications.

The twenty-year period in which she was the owner-editor of the *Picayune* was crucial for the South and particularly for the city of New Orleans. It began with the 1876 presidential elections and the subsequent advent of Redemption, that was the result of a political compromise between Northern and Southern politicians. In 1877 Northern troops left the Southern states, vacating New Orleans where they had stationed for more than fourteen years; soon afterwards the Democrats replaced the Republicans in the city government. From then on, as Northern politicians abandoned the former black slaves whose rights they had been defending since the civil war, Jim Crow laws were gradually introduced in all the Southern states, and the end of Nicholson's editorship in 1896 coincided with Supreme Court's decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* that made segregation constitutional. Although in New Orleans segregation was not as harsh as in other Southern areas, race relations deteriorated and by the mid-1890s violent clashes between white and black workers erupted.

During the same two decades New Orleans slowly recovered from the economic decline that it had experienced since the civil war, and its population increased from 216.000 in 1880 to almost 250.000 in the mid-1890s. Commercial activities in the harbor increased, especially the shipments of cotton. However, to promote commerce and offset competition, New Orleans needed to build new railroads that would connect the city to the rest of the country. The sanitation issue was also urgent and public works

were required to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants, which were particularly unhealthy: floods hit New Orleans when the Mississippi river overflowed in 1874 and in 1882; an epidemic of yellow fever ravaged the town in 1878 and influenza caused the death of hundreds of people—including Eliza Nicholson and her husband—in 1896.

In this scenario Nicholson edited her newspaper and, first of all, she expanded news coverage. She focused on national as well as international news, set up bureaus in other cities and was the only woman to be accepted as a member by the Associated Press. On the local level, she transformed the *Picayune* into an instrument for civic improvement. She fought political corruption and advocated public works: the building of jetties on the Mississippi to control the floods, railroads construction to increase commerce, and cleaner living conditions to prevent epidemics (A Brief History 2). Several of these reforms were implemented and in some cases Nicholson took the merit for their success. For example, when a new railway line was completed, one of its stations was named *Picayune*. Nicholson took other principled stands: education programs in night schools and a children's annex in a city hospital. She was also in favor of animal rights and was instrumental in the creation of the New Orleans branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1888 (Bridges, 1987: 303-316).

Nicholson's editorial support for social and political reforms ran parallel to a series of innovations that she introduced in the *Picayune*, which were unprecedented in a Southern newspaper and deeply altered its style. For the Sunday edition she adopted the formula "news plus entertainment" that had been invented in the 1840s by James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald* and was later perfected by Joseph Pulitzer. In doing so, she turned the *Picayune* into a newspaper of general appeal. She developed the women's pages with articles about fashion, home economics and recipes in order to attract women and increase readership; and she created other features that could be appealing to every member of the family (Bridges, 1975-76: 111-115). Thus, she set up a children's section and made wide use of literary syndicates—as developed by S. S. McClure—publishing fiction by writers like Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle, as well as popular novels issued in installments. In 1879 she herself began to write a gossip column called "Society Bee" that was quite controversial initially, but later became one of the paper's most successful sections (Dabney 307-308). As the years went by her newspaper underwent a further evolution, printing illustrations, comics, sports news, and finally a daily weather forecast column. As a result, the *Picayune* became one of the leading dailies of the South, presenting a wider selection of columns than its contemporaries and one of the largest Sunday sections then published in the United States. Circulation increased drastically: while in 1878 the newspaper printed 6000 copies both on weekdays and on Sunday, in 1891 it reached 19,000 copies on weekdays and 30,000 on Sunday (Dabney 313).

Nicholson's *Picayune* bore striking analogies with Pulitzer's newspapers, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *New York World*. This depended in part on the fact that some of the new sections introduced in the Sunday edition of the *Picayune* were direct imitations of features which appeared in Pulitzer's publications. But the similarities went beyond that: the ideological lines of all these journals resembled each other. In fact, when in 1876 Nicholson announced that she was going to be the editor and publisher of the *Picayune*, she promised that her paper would not be a party organ, but political in a crusading sense, serving the interests of "the people" and not those of "the politicians." Two years later Pulitzer created the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and in his

statement of policy he wrote that his newspaper would “serve no party but the people.” Similarly when he started the *New York World* in 1883, he affirmed in the editorial policy that his paper was “dedicated to the cause of the people” (Morris 161, 209). And again in 1907—that is, four years before dying—Pulitzer summarized the editorial line of his newspapers stating that they were politically independent, opposed to corruption and injustice, and devoted to progress, reform and public welfare (Emery and Emery 205-207). On the surface, thus, Nicholson’s and Pulitzer’s editorial stands coincided.

However, there was a basic difference: Nicholson opposed sensationalism—the very element that lay at the core of Pulitzer’s papers—and followed the same path outlined in 1874 by her first husband, colonel Holbrook: “We criticize without vulgarity, praise without favor, and comment without intemperance” (Dabney 219). Since the *Picayune* was a family newspaper, it had to be respectable and moderate (Marzolf 18-19). This was the key for the paper’s success in a city like New Orleans, whose inhabitants were more open minded than the citizens of other Southern states, but they were certainly more conservative than New Yorkers and would not tolerate the sensational excesses of Pulitzer’s publications.

Furthermore Nicholson was an owner-editor in Pulitzer style, but whereas he was despotic and encouraged ruthless competition among his journalists, she created a friendly atmosphere within her editorial staff and “dominated without being domineering.” In so doing, she became the symbol of a new Southern female identity: Nicholson was an editor and a businesswoman who had achieved success through a gendered approach to journalism, that is, without renouncing her womanly gracefulness. She presented herself as a “modern” working woman who remained primarily a virtuous Southern lady, a devoted wife and a happy mother of two sons, and whose ideas about women’s rights were politically moderate. She did not support women’s right to vote and had no connection to suffrage organizations. However, while not being a militant feminist, she championed and advanced women’s right to work and equal pay. Putting her ideas in concrete form, Nicholson strongly favored women’s careers in journalism and took part in some of their press clubs and associations (Allured 7). She was the first president of the National Woman’s Press Association, organized at the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in New Orleans in 1885, and five years later she became an honorary member of the New York Women’s Press Club (Burt 5, Marzolf 18-19).

She also employed several women journalists, and among them was Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer, alias Dorothy Dix, who later became the most famous advice columnist in the world (Scatamacchia 2011). These women journalists sometimes worked as reporters, but they never carried out the kind of sensational undercover investigations inaugurated in 1887 by Pulitzer reporter Nellie Bly and imitated by many other American women journalists in the following years (Cochrane; Scatamacchia, 2002: 101-109). On the contrary, Nicholson did not allow the women who worked for the *Picayune* to perform such “stunts.” Conscious that a dignified behavior was essential, Nicholson helped herself and her women journalists to be more readily accepted by Louisiana’s conservative public opinion. Thanks to this strategy, she enjoyed her fellow citizens’ general esteem and significantly contributed in making journalism a viable career for Southern women during the period in which she managed her paper.

The same pragmatic strategy of adapting to the conservative and increasingly racist mind of her readers prompted Nicholson to refrain as much as possible from discussions

of racial issues. During the first fifteen years of her tenure at the *Picayune* her editorial policy was to report only casually lynchings, racial discrimination, and other violent actions in which African Americans were victimized (Gilley 233-239). However in the 1890s, while Southern states introduced segregation and voting restrictions, Nicholson could no longer evade this subject, aware that the future of her newspaper as an organ of the mainstream press depended upon it: the *Picayune* had to reflect the views of its readers. As a result on September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1895—just five months before Nicholson’s death—the *Picayune* took an openly racist stand and published an article in favor of disenfranchising the black population (“Constitutional Qualifications” 4). From then on the newspaper reported lynchings at greater length (Logan 296).

Nicholson, thus, was a contradictory figure who struck a progressive tone for the *Picayune* supporting several civic reforms, but held a reactionary position on racial issues; and at that time her stand yielded good results for her newspaper, which continued to thrive. Prepared to sacrifice the interests of black people, she was able to advance more readily her agenda of reforms in the fields of public works, hospitals, education and women’s right to work. Nevertheless, toward the end of her life Nicholson’s ideas about women’s careers in journalism underwent a surprising change that contradicted her previous commitment; and it is relevant that this change took place in the very year when she declared herself in favor of voting restrictions for blacks.

In 1895, after two decades at the helm of the *Picayune*, Nicholson could look back at her career and be really satisfied. She had reached success, was honored and respected in New Orleans as well as in the whole country, and several of the reforms that she had advocated had been implemented. But she was not fully satisfied. Many a time she must have felt quite lonely and unhappy in the typical male role of a newspaper publisher and editor, if she advised other women journalists against following her career pattern. In a lecture to the International League of Press Clubs she stated: “It is serious and hard work, carrying with it a care that cannot be entirely lifted by a devoted husband and faithful and willing workers who aid me in the *Picayune* management” (Harrison 26, Schilpp and Murphy 97). In other words, she discouraged women from becoming newspaper editors and publishers.

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CINZIA SCHIAVINI

WRITING THE CRISIS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN NON-FICTION NARRATIVE

When, in 1937, Erskine Caldwell and Margareth Burke White published *You Have Seen Their Faces*, the book quickly achieved great popularity thanks to its sensationalistic images of hungry families and ragged children. Simultaneously, it suddenly became clear to what extent “telling misery” could be troublesome and even contradictory, especially when it was done from the privileged position of middle-class authors and photographers. This tension was not new: journalists and photographers had been “going slumming” for decades. But it was particularly poignant in a moment when most of the citizens who read it probably identified more easily with “the other half” than with the observer.

The Great Depression has until now been considered the high point of investigation into the social milieu of the working class and the underclass in the United States. However, certain subject areas are so culturally compelling that they persist through periods of marked changes. Documentary prose, in particular, has paralleled the socioeconomic and political turning points in American history, since it has, according to Ronald Weber, “taken as its particular terrain the world of manners and morals, public events and social existence, that has been abandoned (through not completely) as burnt-over territory by imaginative writers” (Weber 16). Precisely because it interacts directly with the socio-political realm, autobiographical reportage is an extremely effective instrument for re-configuring the relation between the text, authorship and readership in times of transition. Such writing provides, not just information, but, as Michael Kramer puts it, “visions of how things fit together now that the center cannot hold” (Kramer 1995).

The social and economic instability of the last two decades has urged several writers to resurrect the genre of social documentary in order to cast a new light on the borders of poverty in the United States, focusing on the underclass and the huge segments of the working and the middle class that are shifting into it. Many labels have been given to these works (“new new journalism,” “literary journalism,” “social travelogue”), testifying to the blurring boundaries of non-fiction writing. These texts are first-person accounts that feed on the fecund intersection of fields like memoir, ethnography, and photo-journalism, and that rely on observation, interviews, written documents, and first-hand experience.

My purpose in this paper is to illustrate how some of these contemporary narratives about poverty and/or the crisis (roughly from the early Eighties to the present) redefine both the literary boundaries of non-fiction and those of the subject matter itself. I would like to evidence the reasons why certain categories related to poverty have obscured other, more blurred forms of economic and social distress, and to draw attention to the ethical questions of this literary situation. What I argue here is that these non-fiction

writings not only unveil the fictionality of the ideological and cultural categories into which poverty has long been confined, but they also succeed in making its new forms visible through their performative action by transforming social distress into an experience prosthetically shared by authors and readers alike.

If one thinks about the representation of poverty and the crisis, the voices that have made themselves audible in the last decades are seldom literary ones: Bruce Springsteen with his songs<sup>1</sup> and Michael Moore with his documentaries (in particular *Roger and Me*, 1989).<sup>2</sup> Written reportage has, with some exceptions, so far received scant critical attention.

To those who may object that our current economic downturn is too recent for cultural forms to catch up, it is useful to point out that there have been narratives that tapped the deep currents of the social crises roiling in the public since the Eighties—but they have remained largely ignored. The difficulty these texts encounter in entering the cultural debate is first of all related to the subject matter itself: poverty is a highly controversial topic, since it questions the American myth of a classless nation. Moreover, the Seventies, the Eighties and (in part) the Nineties are the decades when the question of class was marginalized the most, in favor of other cultural debates and identity politics.<sup>3</sup> Second, despite the fact that investigations about how “the other half lives” have always had their niche in American letters, new forms of poverty have long been invisible in narrative because they did not fit into the categories and images framed in previous times. The very existence of these new forms calls for a broader questioning of the existing social and economic systems, both national and transnational.

Documenting economic distress has long been for many writers like a journey into a foreign country, albeit very close to home: poverty used to be enclosed and circumscribed in specific times (“crisis,” perceived as a transient period) or related to specific social categories (“hoboes,” “tramps,” “migrants,” “illegal aliens”), and understood as the result of a malfunction of the local system. And although these enclosures have been related to specific historical contingencies, it is also clear that hegemonic discourse has long used these categories to defuse the subversive potential of class issues. Poverty has thus been depicted as a condition rooted in specific causes and behaviors (deviant, subversive), whose spaces could be easily marked off, and thus avoided. What has long lacked a compelling narrative is the process of “becoming poor,” a far more disturbing concept since it disrupts (or at least undermines) the myth of a large, unshakable middle class that most Americans still identify with. In terms of rhetorical devices, narratives about poverty have long relied on the distinction between the subjects of investigation and the readers—with the author free to oscillate between the two. Many autobiographies written by hoboes and tramps remarked on the singularity of their own experience, and sometimes even implied that it was the result of a choice. If the author belonged to the middle class, he could make use of inside-informants (like Douglas A. Harper in *Good Company*, 1982; Elliott Liebow in *Tell them Who I Am*, 1993), or he could even “pass,” for a very limited time-span, for poor.

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<sup>1</sup> In particular *Nebraska* (1982); *Born in the USA* (1984), *The Ghost of Tom Joad* (1997, inspired by Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*), and *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* (2006, a tribute to Peter Seeger).

<sup>2</sup> There are also other, less famous filmmakers whose work has been devoted to the exploration of the underclass: Susan Froemke’s *La Lee’s Kin*, on the poverty and illiteracy on the Mississippi Delta; Barbara Kopple’s *American Dream*, on the economic recession in the Midwest. See Stubbs, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> As Walter Benn Michael, among others, argues in his provocative *The Trouble with Diversity*.

One of the first authors describing this form of passing was an African-American writer, Chet Fuller, who, in *I Hear them Calling My Name* (1981) describes his journey South pretending to be a poor field-worker looking for a job—a “fiction” that for Fuller was comparable to racial passing. Another example of this documentary, participatory-observer mode is the highly praised *Rolling Nowhere* (1985) by Ted Conover: the author tries on the life of a hobo on the freight trains, although well provided with travel-cheques and numbers to call in case something goes wrong.

Fuller and Conover violated only temporarily the threshold between “us” and “them” and were sure to let their readers know that they could cross back over the line whenever they wanted, since other elements (first of all a strong sense of class identity, inherited or acquired) preserved the authors’ (and the audience’s) distance from that world.

Those safe boundaries started to be partially eroded in some accounts of the mid-Eighties and Nineties by writers who “did not ride into vagrancy by taxi” (Raban 1). One of these is Lars Eighner, who, in *Travels with Lizbeth* (1991), describes his own narrow descent from casual and low-paid jobs to unemployment and homelessness. No doubt Eighner’s work includes several elements of continuity with previous autobiographies by tramps and hoboes, and it partially confirms the assumption that a line between the readership and the author can still be drawn: he is homosexual, eager to find casual sex, with past psychotic problems.

However, his narrative also incorporates several elements that contribute to shifting the focus from *being* to *becoming* poor. Eighner’s descent is depicted as so gradual that he keeps fluctuating among different identities, which often overlap: while on the road, he continues being a writer, even a successful one in his field (gay erotica), but paid three cents a word, seventy-five dollars a story. With a job that keeps his pride alive, but does not allow him to be properly housed and fed, his identity is split: he is both a tramp and “working poor”—although with a university degree. The specter of poverty keeps haunting him even off the road, after he finds a new job and a room in a shared apartment, even after the publication of the book that made him famous. Moreover, his homelessness never separates him hermetically from his previous network of friends and acquaintances. At the same time, the precarious economic condition of these latter prevents them from helping the author for more than few days—an indication that even the normalcy of this outer world is crumbling.

The shift from an enclosed to a dynamic representation of poverty, that is, from being to becoming, can nowadays be found also in first-person narratives closer to reportage and social survey, where the author, a participant-observer, spends months or years in the field, documenting the lives of largely unrepresented groups he constantly interacts with, while at the same time studying the phenomena with the clear-headed approach of a scholar. The examples I will focus on are Dale Maharidge (writer) and Michael Williamson’s (photographer) *Journey to Nowhere* (1985), a recounting of the effects of de-industrialization in the Rust Belt, as well as *And Their Children After Them. The Legacy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1989), a book that retraces the footsteps of James Agee and Walker Evans’ journey in the world of Alabama sharecroppers fifty years later. More recently, besides exploring the deep intertwining of economic crisis, hegemonic discourse and foreign politics in *Homeland* (2004), the two testified to their personal involvement in the world of the underclass by going back to the places explored in their first journeys and recounting the changes they found in *Someplace Like America* (2011). To their work, I would also add the ethnographic

research of Barbara Ehrenreich on women workers and women's poverty—in particular *Nickled and Dimed. On Not Getting by in America* (2001), a riveting portrait of the lives of contemporary low-wage workers with multiple jobs living on the edge of poverty. These stories were collected by the author through an experiment in “immersion journalism”: her own attempt to stay solvent, decently housed and fed as a worker with three different low-wage jobs (waitress in south Florida, house cleaner in Maine, Wal-Mart worker in Minneapolis), during a three-month struggle to make ends meet that ends in bitter defeat.

The first way in which these narratives open the enclosed spaces of poverty is by depicting the relativity of cultural, social and economic boundaries, and deconstructing the protective barriers that have long kept authors and readers separate from their objects of investigation. By focusing on the border zone slightly above and beneath the Federal Government's official (and inadequate) poverty line, these writers show that poverty cannot be confined to an abstract “other” or “elsewhere,” related only to deviant practices and lifestyles, to specific ethnic, racial or cultural identities. They show how the underclass is formed mainly by people who lost their jobs and by the “working poor,” those whose wages were cut by the shift towards a service economy. In these narratives, poverty itself is shifty: mobile, widespread and not easily predictable; it can reach almost everybody, almost anywhere. All these testimonies would easily fit into the “literature of trauma” tradition, since people's reactions to indigence is often expressed in terms of *shock*: they are victims, physically and psychologically wounded by a war fought not with weapons, but with capital.

What is also de-stabilizing are the spatial coordinates of these worlds: the spaces on the margins are now broken up. They not only intersect but also permeate the spaces of the middle class, creating a “third border,” as Mike Davis in *Magical Urbanism* (2000) has defined it, that no longer marks off only the people of a different race and/or citizenship.

Moreover, these texts dismantle the traditional borders of poverty through a re-articulation of the relation between the content and the context. Like all non-fiction narratives, documentaries are not only what, but how, why, to whom, by whom the facts are told. They rely heavily on multiple exchanges, between the writer and the subjects (with the accelerated intimacy created by months spent together and interviews), between the author, the texts and the audience. The power of these narratives relies on their capability to enact their meaning intersubjectively, to evoke forms of public identity and civil interaction that transcend the boundaries of the text, turning authorship, as it will be shown, into a form of mediated discourse.

Undoubtedly these fact-based narratives depend largely on the authors' role in them, in their first-person engagement in the events. Although documenting reality “poses truth as a moral imperative” (Rabinowitz 18), all narratives are intrinsically persuasive. American literary journalism has never been neutral, stemming as it does from a deeply subjective literary tradition (Crane, Dreiser, Cather, Hemingway, and so on), where the author plays a key role in mediating between the subjects and his readership. Contemporary authors are aware of the fact that they are not just the means of the story, but the ones who give meaning to it. And they are willing to act as compromised intermediaries, facing the implicit contradictions of their acts of writing. The primary complication in their writing is how to make social and economic distress visible without, as Walker Evans wondered when he saw White's work, turning it into “another exploitation of people who had already been exploited” (Fishkin 146).

To contemporary authors, as it was for Agee and Evans, legitimacy is crucial: they question their own right to tell the stories. In spite of the (sometimes) apparent impersonality of their prose (Leviatin), writers legitimate their narratives and their right to tell them through an extended, sometimes prosthetic sense of belonging to those worlds. It is not only a question of temporary empathy, the result of months and years spent on the road, but a search for convergences also located in the past, that poses questions to the future as well. The discursive strategies adopted are many: authors underline their family background (Ehrenreich reminds the reader of her working class milieu), or their geographical and familiar closeness to the worlds investigated (Maharidge and Williamson), or similar experiences in their past (Ehrenreich's jobs as a teenager to save for college). What is highlighted is not only the temporary status of working poor (Ehrenreich) or migrants (Maharidge and Williamson), during their in-field research, but all those contingencies that could have led them to live similar lives: not "I am not like them," but "I could have been like them." The "foreign spaces" of economic distress become "home." The texts thus enact a prosthetic belonging with a performative action that functions, as Rabinowitz wrote about documentaries, "to remand, if not actively remake, the subject into historical agents" (Rabinowitz 8).

As Terry Eagleton has recently reminded us, ethics is a question of empathy: it is the product of a collective process, that can alter behavior and transcend the individual. It can re-establish the connection between the word and the power. Through in-field research and experience, these writers do not only resurrect authorship as a form of indirect discourse through which the poor can speak; they also lead the way towards direct participation and (sometimes) identification with the poor. These writers use non-fiction's capacity to tell the truth, to persuade, to involve—by breaking the boundaries that separate the readers from the content of texts, "us" from "them."

Their end looks ambitious: to turn art into public speech and ethics into politics. Not an easy task, and not yet well recognized, but certainly worth a try.

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PAOLO SIMONETTI

WHY ARE COMICS NO LONGER COMIC?  
GRAPHIC NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

I tend to think of tragedy as a kind of adolescent response to the universe—the higher truth is a comic response.

Robert Coover, “An Interview with Robert Coover” *Critique* 11.3 (1996)

The aim of this paper is to tackle the complex relationship between comics and comedy in the United States, by focusing on two artists whose graphic works cannot be considered novels in the traditional sense: Art Spiegelman’s cartoons as well as his famous collection of broadsides on 9/11, *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2002-2004), and Chris Ware’s anthology of (mostly) comics, bearing the half-serious, confusing title: *The Acme Novelty Library Annual Report to Shareholders and Rainy Day Saturday Afternoon Fun Book* (2005). I argue that a brief overview on these very different books will be useful to investigate whether historical and cultural issues as well as questions regarding politics and democracy, are actually incompatible with the comedy and humor inherent in the grammar of comics.

Both Spiegelman and Ware (though belonging to different generations of comic artists) employ tools usually associated with comedy in order to deconstruct the idea of light entertainment. In their recent works, they use the history of comics and the old cartoon vocabulary as a kind of palimpsest, in which the layers reflect and comment on each other, making personal and historical events, comic situations and tragic occurrences, collide. In 2004, Spiegelman remarked that “Comics may no longer be the ‘real name’ for a narrative medium that intimately intertwines words and pictures but isn’t necessarily comic in tone” (“Glassy-Eyed Private I”). Though he was specifically referring to the ongoing dispute over the term “graphic novel,” he was also underlining the trend of increasing seriousness in recent comics. It seems that, in order to write memoirs, biographies, and historical dramas, artists try to avoid the fun that the medium originally conveyed; as a matter of fact, the section of a newspaper reserved for comic strips was originally called “funny paper,” and the comic strips themselves were called “funnies,” so as to define an art form not to be taken seriously. With their broad physical comedy, the first comics owed much to caricature and vaudeville, and they were immensely popular, but also disreputable. Now it seems that, in order to defend the respectability they have recently conquered, comics can no longer be comic.

With the new millennium, graphic novels have entered mainstream culture in the US and all over the world, receiving greater attention in museums, galleries, and libraries, as well as in classrooms and literary circles; new scholarly infrastructures for the study of comics have been created, while an increasing number of faculty have integrated comics and graphic literature into their courses. Simultaneously, the recent discipline of visual culture studies, focusing “on the centrality of vision and the visual world in

producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes and power relations within culture” (Rogoff 24), has promoted a new hermeneutics of vision, according to which “visual experience is approached as a socio-historical realm of interpretive practices ... , as an occasion for self-reflexive inquiries to change conventional perspectives and modes of thought” (Heywood and Sandywell xi).

Tellingly enough, though theorists describe visual culture as opening up “an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds and spatial delineations are read on and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and of subjective responses” (Rogoff 24), comics and graphic narratives are scarcely mentioned in their discussions. If visual studies are situated at “the confluence of art history, cultural studies, and literary theory” (Elkin 5), then the discipline could surely benefit from a thorough analysis of the grammar of comics, considered as the result of a crossbreeding between text and image, visual art and storytelling. By studying graphic literature in the light of the issues raised by visual culture studies, and by acknowledging that in our society vision is a cultural construction rather than simply given by nature, it is possible to better evaluate the impact of comics into our visual-oriented culture.

When asked why comics entered the domain of serious reading around 2000, Spiegelman joked: “I hope it’s not related to the [Bush] administration” (Ferozhar). In fact, comics and politics have always been strictly connected in the US, as testified by the long tradition of editorial cartoons on newspapers, dating back to 1754, when Benjamin Franklin published the famous “Join or die” cartoon in his *Pennsylvania Gazette*—the illustration of a snake in severed pieces, intended to goad the different colonies into joining what was to become the United States. Then, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, magazine cartoons branched into two categories, the political and the purely comic (the so called “gag cartoons”); soon enough, “cartoonists began to realize that the comedic impact of their work would be much enhanced if the meaning or significance of the words under the pictures could be understood only by comprehending the role of the picture. And vice versa” (Harvey 29). From then on, gag cartoons privileged politics as their main topic, and satirically represented and commented on the current most controversial issues.

On the other hand, Marjane Satrapi has recently stated that “comics aren’t supposed to be ‘serious,’ so we can say anything” (Ferozhar). Obviously enough, she refers to the style of the drawings rather than the themes discussed. Indeed, her graphic novels stimulate very serious reflections; in order to graduate from the US Military Academy at West Point, cadets from the class of 2006 had to study *Persepolis*, her coming-of-age tale set during the Iranian revolution, because it reputedly gave them a better understanding of Iran than any academic text, newspaper report or strategy paper. The recent boom in historical graphic novels may indeed derive from the need to acquire fresh and original ways of commenting on the increasingly controversial political and social issues of the day.

In this regard, Spiegelman said that he was “shocked” by Roberto Benigni’s movie *La vita è bella* (1997), because it banalized and trivialized the Holocaust. He accused Benigni of making the movie “with good intentions, which usually are paving stones for getting one place or another, sometimes to an Oscar” (“5,000 Pound Maus” 194). In 1999, Spiegelman drew a controversial cartoon for *The New Yorker* portraying a skeletal concentration camp prisoner holding an Oscar in a barbed-wire cell; the caption, quoting an advertisement for the film, read: “Be a Part of History and the Most Successful Foreign Film of All Time.”

In Spiegelman's opinion, Benigni used the Holocaust as a metaphor for a nuisance that humor can help alleviate, if not completely cancel: "I guess the message of that film was something like, if you can keep your sense of humor you can even survive a bumper. And the Holocaust is just a metaphor for a bumper" ("Healing Images"). Similar opinions were expressed in the aftermath of 9/11, when *The New York Times* apologized with readers if "the tone of some articles and advertising is inconsistent with the gravity of news" (Doniger 389-90). Writers, comedians, and journalists argued for weeks over when (and whether at all) it was safe to laugh and joke again; as if, after such tragedies, comedy were forbidden. We know that the opposite is true: several works about trauma underline the fact that once we have overcome the shock of a tragic experience, we inevitably need to reconstruct it by joking about it; in this way, we can reframe the episode in our own terms, transforming it from a passive suffering into an active response.<sup>1</sup>

Spiegelman himself is aware of this, since he has recently turned to gallows humor. Commenting on the 2006 Danish cartoons that enraged fundamentalist Muslims because of the allegedly offensive drawings of Prophet Muhammad, he made several ironic statements about his use of animals to depict different races and nationalities:

In my graphic novel, *Maus*, I managed to offend Jews, Poles, Germans, and even cat lovers like Desmond Morris, who claimed that my depiction of Nazis as cats was the worst thing to happen to ailurophiles since the Middle Ages. As a cover artist for *The New Yorker*, I've upset the New York City Police Department, our mayor and governor, Christians, Muslims, African Americans, and more Jews. ("Drawing Blood" 46)

In the same article, Spiegelman responded to Iran's challenging announcement of an international Holocaust cartoon competition with a provocative, anti-negationist cartoon, depicting inmates at a death camp on their way to the gas chamber; one of them is doubled over in laughter, while the caption states: "Ha! Ha! Ha! What's really hilarious is that none of this is actually happening!" Ironically enough, the cartoon strongly recalls the moving final scene of Benigni's movie, with the main character, Guido, who laughs and jokes with his son while he is being brought to death by a camp guard.

Why did Spiegelman change his mind about the ways comedy may represent historical tragedies? Between his first comments on Benigni's movie and his recent satirical cartoon, something happened—not only to himself and to America, with the terrorist attacks of 9/11, but also to comics: they have acquired literary status. *In the Shadow of No Towers* represents the author's way of coping with a trauma he experienced first-hand, and which he could not possibly relate into graphic form in the way he adopted for *Maus*, also because of the new literary status of the medium.

The broadsides on 9/11 that form the first part of his book are designed in the fashion of old newspaper funny pages, and are full of grotesque, satirical, comic or irreverent panels that were originally rejected by many important magazines because they were considered politically threatening. Spiegelman himself commented in the book's introduction that "the climate of discourse in America shifted dramatically just as I concluded the series. What was once unsayable now began to appear outside the marginalized alternative press and late-night cable comedy shows" (*In the Shadow*). Something similar happened to comics. When artists had to struggle for respectability

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of humorous reframing of 9/11 as a means of recovery and healing, see Doniger, "Terror and Gallows Humor" and Zwagerman, "A Day That Will Live in Irony."

and literary recognition, they banned humor from the pages of their comics; once the medium reached a stable place in the canon, comedy surfaced again —and in creative, original ways.

Though critics dismiss political comedy because it trivializes serious issues and fuels public cynicism, comedy and democracy are inextricably connected. Being such a powerful tool for criticism, historical and political satire—especially the one conveyed in graphic form by cartoons or comics—is a crucial element of any democracy. It encourages free speech and fosters interest in political issues and in historical crucial events, analyzing them from different perspectives and making them more accessible. Contemporary comic artists use different techniques to make politics and comedy converge in their works. If Spiegelman reaches his best results by resorting to the old comic strips in order to satirize the Bush administration and distort the pervasive images of 9/11 shown by the media, Chris Ware parodies several kinds of old-fashioned imagery in order to expose the limits of American democracy.

If the unusually oversized dimensions of some of Ware's books recall the full newspaper-size Sunday pages of the old funnies, the incredible amount of information conveyed in every page, along with painfully tiny letters and tricky and complicated diagrams and layouts, ask for a greater amount of concentration than that usually requested by traditional comic books. The pages of his *Acme Novelty Library* issues are full of collectibles, tourist post cards, make-it-yourself paper toys, or fake mail-in ads and coupons typical of old comic books. Except that these advertise, for instance, "large negro storage boxes" on sale for five million dollars:

These giant-size handy storage containers (designed by famous European craftsmen) are just the thing to keep unsightly Negroes out from under foot and to make sure that your city continues to run cleanly and efficiently without them. ... Available in grey or tan. Limited time only. Expensive scientific studies show that Negroes will actually tolerate them. Get two. ... Negroes go in, but they don't really seem to come out. Educational excitement for the whole family. Be the first on your block to get a Negro storage box. (*Annual Report* 66)

Other "novelties" for sale include a new reality show called "enduring freedom," that promises to show "history as it happened," while a woman in bikini embraces a soldier who shoots an Arab looking man (*Annual Report* 91); a coupon for a free admission to the United States that includes a "rectal exam," along with "due process," "indefinite detention," and "a free video rental" (*Annual Report* inside cover); a perfume called "de Tocqueville," advertised as "the snide individualism of the New World, tempered by the rugged sophistication of the old" (*Annual Report* 91); and finally, a reminder to USA military troops: an easy-to-spot cartoon character, named Juan Tanamo, that testifies to the legality of torture and detention: "Before you interrogate or humiliate," the caption warns us, "be sure to look for Juan and his subjugated, reluctant half-smile" (*Acme Novelty* #19, back cover).

Ware declared in an interview that he considers these fake ads as "throwaway" parts of his comics, since "drawing the kind of comics that I do takes so long that to specifically address something as transitory as a political matter in it would be about as effective as composing a symphony with hopes that it would depose a despot" ("On Cartooning"). Yet, though disseminated between strips and often written in a tiny type, they can hardly be skipped, and form an important part of his works. We can say that Ware's anthologies, as well as his American Book Award winner graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kind on Earth* (2000), and the several strips, illustrations,

posters, murals and booklets he has variously created, redefine Gerard Genette's concept of paratext in a postmodern way. Since issue #16 of *The Acme Novelty Library*, Ware began to self-publish his periodical comic-book series, designing every part of it, from the cover to the colophon, from the blurbs to the copyright issues and the price tags. In this way, he can state that his anthology costs "\$27.50 dollars in the United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Afghanistan, and Iraq" and "\$39.95 in the Canadian Wilderness, until we invade them, too" (*Annual Report* paper band wrapper).

Significantly enough, only after reading *Maus* did Ware verge toward a more "serious" approach to comics:

*Maus* was about something even I could handle as being serious. ... At that time I decided to try and do comics that had a truly "serious" tone to them. I had already had my heart stomped a couple of times and I realized that art could provide more than just cool drawings and spaceships. (Groth 127)

Then, he understood that writing comics may also involve serious social and political responsibilities:

I know that I'm living in a country where all needs and comforts for a large part of the population have been met frequently at great cost to other parts of the world, however, so writing stories about its inhabitants takes on a sort of responsibility in and of itself. ("On Cartooning")

He nonetheless resorted to the tools of comedy and satire in order to comment on controversial political issues, explaining that this is part of a precise poetics: "Artists like Dan Clowes, Jason Lutes, and myself, are all trying to tell a serious story using the tools of jokes. It's as though we're trying to write a powerful, deeply engaged, richly detailed epic with a series of limericks" (Juno 53). We can say that Ware's books make both characters and readers experience fun on a different level, as it happens to most of us during our adult life, without an uncommitted abandonment to it. According to Ware, comics are "visual approximations of the way we remember general ideas," and they "suggest a perceptual experience" that "is more or less the way we actually experience the world as adults" ("On Cartooning").

Reflecting on representation as related to the idea of realism, Neil Mulholland, among others, has recently stated: "Given that the 'real world' continues to mean different things to different people, 'realism' is far from being a transparent or settled term. Cultures acquire the mode of representation that their ideological presumptions support" (Mulholland 119). In Ware's comics, comedy becomes a part of this process of mimesis, and it plays a crucial role in his poetics, as he clearly expresses in the "Apology and Souvenir Comic Strip" published on the inside of the paper band wrapped around his *Annual Report*. In it, the author draws himself at home, while feeding his baby daughter and talking to his seemingly uninterested wife. He dismisses his gag strips as sort of diversions from his longer works, but this idea occupies only the upper, superficial part of his speech-balloon. At a first level, jokes give the author the confidence to "keep going in a more 'serious' direction;" he admits he has published an anthology of "this stuff" only because he has not finished a long book yet (*Annual Report*, paper band wrapper).

On a second level though, he acknowledges the therapeutic value of comedy; he says that jokes make himself feel better, and he provocatively describes this feeling as "a disgustingly impure, immoral, and endemically American impulse," implicitly dismissing all the complaints about the appropriateness of comedy after a sad or tragic

event. Funny comics can alleviate suffer and anger, and have indeed done so during the Second World War, as well as after 9/11.

Finally, the lowest and deepest level of his speech-balloon links comedy to a precise poetics of realism. The author does not trust “punchlines,” because “they don’t exist in the real world, so,” he asks, “why should I accommodate them in *art*?”

Such a pronouncement is implicitly stated also by Spiegelman, in his tackling of the Holocaust and the terrorist attacks of 9/11; though Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell argue that “art, required to ‘represent’ the un-representable, can only do so through an interminable series of deconstructive negations of its difference, ironically becoming in the process an extreme formalism” (xv), nonetheless Western culture has always been “ocular-centric” and “vision-based,” and “seeing has become in many cases a metaphor for perspective” (Zelizer 1, 2), especially in the representations of tragic occurrences such as the Holocaust.

In their works, both Spiegelman and Ware aim at visually representing reality as it is truly experienced, with jokes and funny moments, but without impressive punchlines that offer light and easy entertainments. By drawing attention to the code of comic-making, and consequently to its apparatus (both technical and socio-cultural), they destabilize the site of comic readership whilst concurrently reconfiguring the effect of comedy and humor in the political field.

We can see that today comics are still comic, but in a conscious, more realistic way. If we read Spiegelman’s reflections on 9/11 and Ware’s fake ads in this light, we can understand how joking on the tragedies of history and on the flaws of American democracy may not only awaken citizens to the political process, but also represent otherwise neglected aspects of our experience of reality, namely the contradictory ways in which we experience tragedy as adults. Moreover, comics may teach something about democracy by answering revengeful threats with self-irony, as Spiegelman’s cartoons did, or by joking on controversial issues of American civilization, such as slavery and imperialism, without minimizing the questions at stake.

Yet, Ware cannot help joking on the possibility of total annihilation in the end of his strip. Just after having explained his poetics and refused the concept of punchline, he draws the outline of a city surmounted by an atomic mushroom cloud, with the words “The End” on it, to mark both the sketch’s and the world’s end. Of course, he seems to imply, this is our doom and our relief as well: to joke on the verge of disaster.

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Art Spiegelman - *New Yorker*, 15 March 1999, p. 97.



"HA! HA! HA! WHAT'S REALLY MALARIOUS IS THAT NONE OF THIS IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING!"

Art Spiegelman – *Harper's Magazine* June 2006, p. 52.



“Hey fellas, how about a break?”



*Tough guys? High time for a rest, and a refresher. Whether you're employing strict sensory deprivation, techniques of sexual disgrace, or just piling people into big human pyramids, leave your robust, richly detailed prisoners with the security detail for a minute or two and take a moment to ... relax.*

*Pause ... and be grateful for the top tropical detourship we don't politically recognize that lets us fly military prisoners halfway around the world without having to worry about being prosecuted in a world court or international tribunal. It's so close, so convenient. Why ... it's practically in our own back yard.*

*BUT ... not all Central American nations are created equal. That's why we've made up this easy-to-spot cartoon*

*character ... just so you know that when you're waterboarding your randomly-selected subjects or taking them where the rest of the fucking oil is hidden or just "having a little fun," you'll know you're doing it in a 100% sorta-kinda-legal Protectorate of our Homeland.*

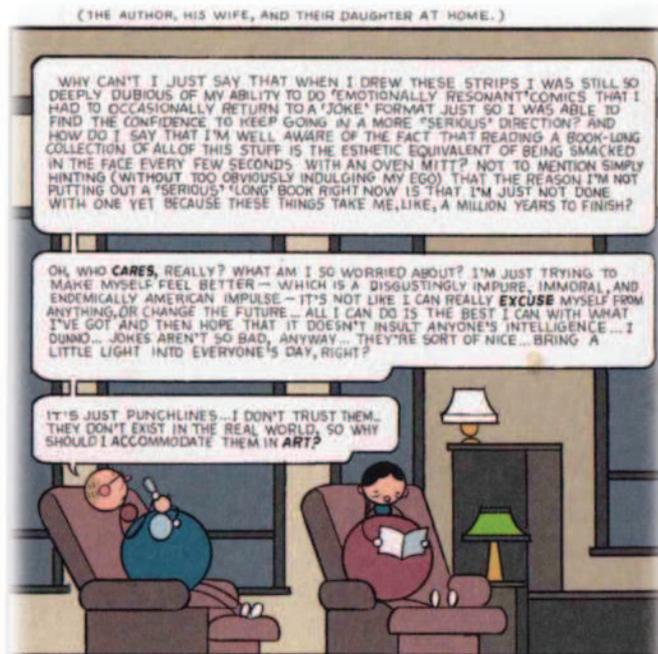


*Remember: before you interrogate or humiliate, be sure to look for Jason and his subjugated, reluctant half-ends. It's an expression you've come to expect from a people who are impoverished, powerless and afraid for their lives, regardless of which hemisphere they were born in. Aren't we lucky these people seem to be everywhere?*

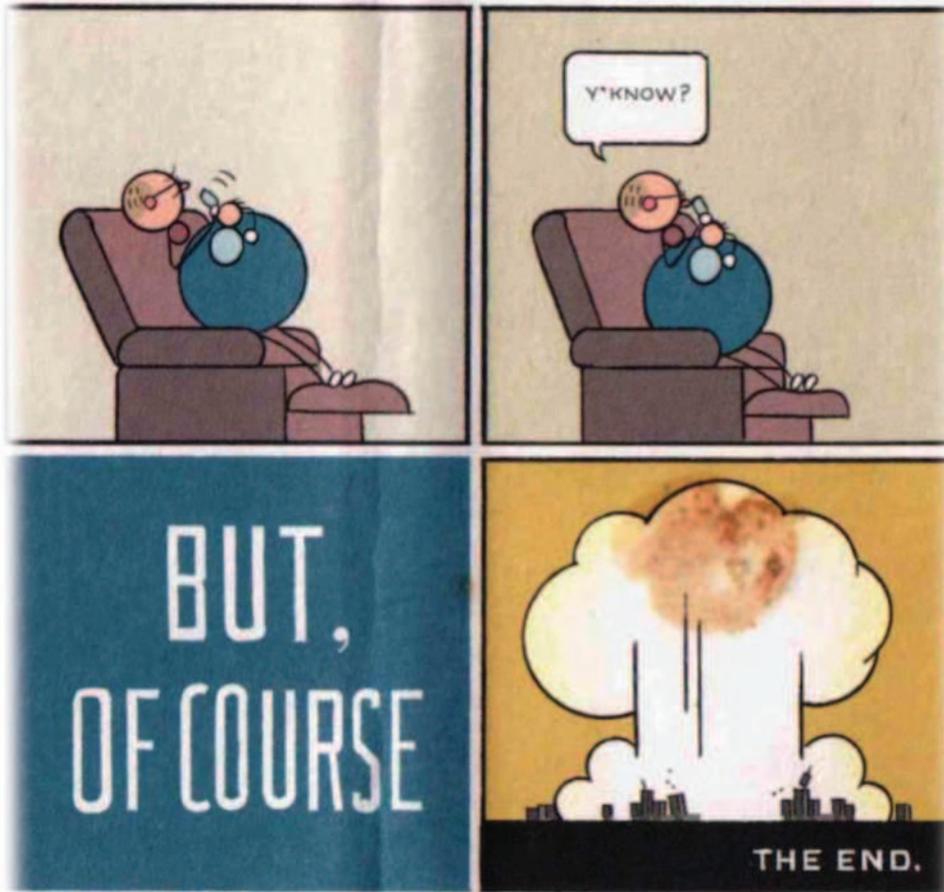
The United States of America ... good 'til the last drop.

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Chris Ware – *The Acme Novelty Library* 19, Fall/Winter 2008, back cover



Chris Ware – *Annual Report*, 2005, paper band wrapper



Chris Ware – *Annual Report*, 2005, paper band wrapper



LORENA CARBONARA AND ANNARITA TARONNA

IN SEARCH OF NEW SEA(E)SCAPES: THE METAPHORS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN  
FROM MYTHOLOGICAL TO CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES

Olivier Roy, in the last part of his keynote speech “The Mediterranean and its Metaphors” at the tenth Mediterranean Research Meeting in Montecatini Terme (2009), pointed out that:

In Turkish, there exists another way to call the Mediterranean: Ak Deniz, white sea, as opposed to Kara Deniz, black sea—white standing for the white sand, and black for the black sand. In the Turkish languages, the opposition couple white and black is more classificatory than descriptive. (10)

The association of colors (specifically of white/black) with the image of the sea, drawn by Roy, underpins the following essay, which aims at tracing a creative narrative line between the images of the Mediterranean sea and the Atlantic ocean. The latter was defined by Paul Gilroy as “Black” Atlantic (1993), with a reference—in his general discussion of black culture, consciousness and modernity—to the millions of deaths occurred during centuries of slave trade (the so-called Middle Passage). A series of questions also lies at the basis of our cross-disciplinary enquiry:

- Can we talk of a Mediterranean Middle Passage?
- How can the knowledge of past events related to the African diaspora improve our awareness of the contemporary Mediterranean situation?
- Can we talk of sea(e)scapes, intended as places where water plays an important role as a metaphor and vehicle of transformation and translation (= transportation)?

To begin, let’s analyze briefly the concepts of *land(e)scape* and the neologisms coined by Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (1996), together with the concept of *translationscape* elaborated by Annarita Taronna, in 2009, and the idea of sea(e)scapes. The suffix “scapes,” in the anthropology of globalization, refers to the transnational distribution of determined elements (i.e. technological, financial, media resources, etc.), that delineate the various “land-scapes” of our contemporary world. According to Appadurai, the world in which we live is constantly crossed by a series of flows, that he defines as “ethnoscapes” (flows of people), “mediascapes” (media flows), “financescapes” (money exchanges), “technoscapes” (technological spread) and “ideoscapes” (flows of ideas and ideologies). These flows, or changing “land-scapes,” can be considered as part of the driving power and the result of the process of indigenization that globalization brought to every corner of the Earth, and that he calls “modernity at large.”

“Translationscape,” following this logic, is the translational space surrounding our lives, which is constantly constructed by the translations we are urged to perform to

negotiate our identities among the various “scapes” that cross our reality. Thus, we daily face various ethnoscares, mediascares, technoscares, financescares and ideoscares, and we consequently develop our personal “translationscape.” As Ulf Hannerz points out in “Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids: Keywords in Transnational Anthropology” (1997):

The way we talk now about culture in flux, about the zones where cultures meet, and about the agents and products of cultural mixing is certainly in some respects different from the anthropology of even ten years ago. Yet perhaps we can hear in it some echoes from this rather stop-go, on-and-off history of earlier anthropologies of interconnectedness, partly disconnected from one another over time. The changing language of anthropology may show some of what we remember, some of what is half-forgotten, and some of what has been reinvented. (3)

Our concept of sea(e)scape emerges from the acknowledgement of the present international socio-political situation, which reminds us of the ambivalent perceptions surrounding our Mediterranean sea—seen as a geographical but also metaphorical location. Nowadays, in search for “l’America,”<sup>1</sup> millions of people are dying in the Mediterranean waters longing for a route to Europe (or the Western world), for freedom, and stability. All this urges us to think of the new emerging sea(e)scares: the Mediterranean can be seen as a sea of im/mortality (maybe...black?) which both separates, brings together and looms horizons that stretch out physically and metaphorically, inclusively and exclusively offering the crossers promises of imaginary lands, and then, dashing them in the offing.<sup>2</sup> We are trying to investigate whether we can talk of sea(e)scares, intended as places where water plays an important role as a metaphor and as a vehicle of transformation and translation (transportation)?

The same ambivalent “destiny” is shared by the Atlantic Ocean, the sea in which black people lost their freedom, and their lives; the same sea that millions of people have crossed for centuries in search for “l’America.” Caribbean writer Dionne Brand describes the ocean as something overwhelming, “bigger than feeling” (11), and at the same time as something that sounds as “a thousand secrets, all whispered at the same time” (8). She associates the images of intimacy (the secrets whispered) with the idea of the wide open sea, which uses and transforms everything (think of the pieces of rounded glass that we normally find on the beach), and which gave her “an immediate sense of how large the world was, how magnificent and how terrifying” (7). Predrag Matvejevic, in *Mediterranski Brevijar* (1987), evocatively suggests that: “the Atlantic or the Pacific are the seas of the distance, the Mediterranean is the sea of proximity” (26).<sup>3</sup>

The metaphors of the Mediterranean have been many and ambivalent throughout history since it has been portrayed as a bridge or as a frontier, a point of arrival and departure, stasis and transition, entrapment and escape, belonging and not belonging. It has been looked at as a sort of salt lake among different continental lands (Europe, Asia and Africa), as the etymology of the word Medi-terranean testifies (see Zaccaria, 2011); and its border-lands have come to represent the limits of what has been intellectually

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<sup>1</sup> In the Italian language lots of puns and idiomatic expressions include the word America, such as “ha fatto la scoperta dell’America,” when a person wants to underline that a particular discovery—real or metaphorical—was not a piece of a news for the interlocutors; or “ho trovato l’America,” when somebody manages to find a peculiarly fruitful situation in which there are lots of advantages for the individual.

<sup>2</sup> We are obviously referring to the situation of the African migrations toward Lampedusa.

<sup>3</sup> This translation from the Italian edition of the book, *Breviario Mediterraneo*, is ours.

known, acknowledged and accepted by the people who inhabit it. Speaking about the necessity of the creation of a constantly changing vocabulary to describe and express ourselves as human beings in the contemporary world, Hannerz states:

These days, rather than seeking out the comfortable intimacy of village life, we debate the cultural distance between ship and shore, and the ways of traversing that distance. Flux, mobility, recombination and emergence have become favored themes as globalization and transnationality frequently offer the contexts for our thinking about culture. We now look for test sites of theory where some, at least, of the inhabitants are creoles, cosmopolitans, or cyborgs, where communities are diasporas, and where boundaries do not really contain, but are more often interestingly crossed. Borderlands are often where the action is, and hybridity and collage are among our preferred words for characterizing qualities in people and their products. (2)

What is interesting to notice is that the image of the door/gate is present in the mythography of both the seas: the Pillars of Hercules for the Mediterranean and the figuration of the Door of No Return for the Atlantic Ocean. The Pillars of Hercules, whose location, East (towards the Black Sea) or West of the Mediterranean (towards the Iberian Peninsula), has been questioned throughout history by numerous writers and scholars<sup>4</sup> are both a geographical and metaphorical place beyond which, in the Western tradition, Plato located Atlantis, Columbus searched for a way to the Indies and Dante placed the Mount Purgatory. They represent “the end of the known” and “the beginning of the unknown,” the *nec plus ultra*—nothing further beyond. Whereas, the Door of No Return—“a place, real, imaginary and imagined” (Brand 19)—was the door (*la Maison des Esclaves*) out of which African people were captured and forcedly sent to America from Goree Island in Senegal; it can be considered as the end of the world as Africans knew it and the beginning of the unknown.

These two images share the idea that the doors/pillars are not only a geographical location, as much as a “spiritual” place where new identities are formed: “in some desolate sense it was the creation place of Blacks in the New World Diaspora” (5), Brand affirms talking about the Door of No Return; while the Pillars, mythologically, were considered as the last material and mental place that humans could reach, or as the gate towards richer and better lands. In both cases, water played, and still plays, an important physical and metaphorical role as it represents the actual carrier of people, goods, hope, fulfilment, and tragedy. It is a fact and a metaphor, a fluid location where migrants start to construct their new identity. “Our origins seemed to be in the sea” (12), Brand affirms.

As for millions of Africans during the Middle Passage across the Atlantic, the waters of the Mediterranean can be considered “black”—the colour associated with death in many Western cultural traditions but, at the same time, they are seen as a sea(e)scape. The concept of sea(e)scape represents the lens through which we interpret our Mediterranean and Trans-Atlantic present, and also the key to understand the possible ideological developments of the transnational world that we navigate today remaining seated at our computers. The desktop facing us every day, the net we surf in search for knowledge (of events, theories, documents, and emotions), can be interpreted as the new Pillars of Hercules, an undefined “black” space that we constantly cross, or sail across, as modern migrant-Euro-American-explorers. Hannerz also lingers on this aspect:

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Sergio Frau (2002) puts into question the traditional geography of the Mediterranean and positions the pillars in the Sicilian sea.

When as scholars we face the ‘frontiers of knowledge,’ it is also this sense of the frontier as next to wilderness that takes hold of our imagination. On this side, the cultivated fields; on the other, the great unknown. And the sense of wilderness is still there as the idea of the frontier in the popular imagination now often shifts its locus, to urban life, to streets and alleys which seem beyond the reach of the organized centers of society. (10)

As Brand impressively notes, talking about the BBC news that her fellows of the Caribbean island passionately follow on the radio every single day, the new media represent our “door to over there,” our individual gate to get into the “big public world.” In a certain sense, as modern Ulysses (in Dante’s interpretation), we constantly try to cross the Pillars, to know more than what is expected or accepted, thus risking to turn the net into a Door of No Return. The water metaphor—notice that we normally say “surfing the net” when we are searching for information online—is still very powerful, and it allows us to enlarge the concept of sea(e)scape.

To this end, the need to find new figurations to describe our reality has led us to the recognition, collection and deconstruction of a new vocabulary of words and images gathered so far in an in-progress corpus of some articles published in Italian, English and American newspapers<sup>5</sup> and magazines with the attempt to show that, in these turbulent narratives written on the wet bodies of the crossers, new sea metaphors are emerging together with a new anti-democratic border language. In particular, the circulation of stories and discussions on migration we have taken into account, in all their forms, lead to a consideration of the trajectories and imaginary that are linked in the anthropology and in the geopolitics of language. Crucially, language is to be conceived here in the same terms as those evocatively used by Vergilio Ferreira in the following quote:

A language is the place from where you see the world and in which you trace the limits of our thinking and feeling. From my language you can see the sea. From my language you can hear its noise as well as from the others’ language you will hear the noise of the forest or the silence of the desert. Thus, the voice of the sea coincides with that of our restlessness. (83-84, our translation)

As Ferreira’s words suggest, language is a place to be shared and a border to be crossed in the context of contemporary migrations which are characterized by an intense circulation of people, cultures, and goods. Such translational flows shape new forms of diasporic narratives embedded in an exclusionary and discriminating rhetoric which reflect the dramatic asymmetric, hierarchical and hegemonic power relationships between territories and its inhabitants. From these theoretical assumptions we can infer that language is never innocent or neutral in that it reflects and structures our ideologies and world views. This is especially true when we come across the wide use of metaphors as those adopted and spread by media, as well as by governments and institutions, to talk about migration which carry with them certain implications for the way we think about, and therefore act towards, migrants. We therefore need to become self-conscious about our use of this language and this means that we have to talk about them, or represent them, by means of other concepts which *are* easily, or more directly, knowable.<sup>6</sup> The fact that we are unselfconscious about the “metaphors we live by” is

<sup>5</sup> The main Italian sources are *Il sole 24ore*, *Il Manifesto*, *La Repubblica*; the English and American sources are *the Economist* and *The New York Times*.

<sup>6</sup> There is a very interesting book by the linguist George Lakoff and the philosopher Mark Johnson called *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) which, as the title implies, deals with the impact metaphor has on our daily lives. They make three particularly important points about our use of metaphors in everyday

crucial, because it explains their power to determine, or influence, the way we act in relation to the objective events and processes the metaphors represent.

Against this background, our research attempt is to investigate the use and abuse of the water metaphor as the most pervasive rhetorical strategy that the current international and national media use in talking about migration across the Mediterranean. As shown by the words listed below (but see the handouts for the specific context in which they appear in both languages), they speak of flows, streams, waves and trickles of migrants as well as of “asylum capacity.” They also speak of dams and of sluice gates, of being flooded, inundated and swamped:

*Prime gateway*  
*The tempest*  
*Boat-people*  
*20,000 Tunisian migrants washed up on the Italian island of Lampedusa*  
*Italy is confronted by a bigger wave*  
*The flow of migrants*  
*Migration flows*  
*The human flows*  
*A wave of rebellion began sweeping across North Africa*  
*A human tsunami*  
*A steady flow of North African migrants*  
*A steady flow of people*

*L'ondata di sbarchi*  
*Le carrette del mare*  
*Inghiottiti dal mare*  
*Onde proibitive*  
*Stipati come sardine nel mare in tempesta*  
*Nell'acqua gelida del canale della morte*  
*Le onde che hanno inghiottito tutti gli altri*  
*In acqua era un inferno*  
*Un mare di guerra*  
*L'immenso sepolcro che è divenuto il Mare Nostrum*  
*Sotto i ponti sono passate acque assai torbide*  
*Gli idraulici di governo*  
*Rubinetti da fermare e vasche da svuotare*  
*Tsunami umano (Mezzadra, 2002)*

Even at a first and a quick reading of this long list of words, what immediately emerges is that the metaphorical language spread by both English, American and Italian newspapers and magazines to talk about migration is obviously not innocent, by which we mean three things. First, it is not the language of migrants themselves, but of their hosts, or potential hosts. The language of migration, in other words, is spoken from a sedentary, or state-centric perspective. It is the language *we* use to talk about *them*, even if we, or our ancestors, were also migrants once. Second, this metaphorical language requires us to think of it as some kind of natural event, an inexorable process with its own logic and force. As something which we didn't bring about but something which we ignore at our peril. As something that we cannot easily prevent but which threatens to overwhelm us. And as something we must therefore defend ourselves against, dam the stream, divert it, put up barriers to it—preferably keep it as far away from us as

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speech. First, this is something we do all the time; second, we *have* to do it in order to be able to think and communicate; third, most of the time, we speak metaphorically without realizing we are doing so.

possible. Third, the metaphors such narratives use to talk about migration across the Mediterranean require us to think of migrants as an undifferentiated mass—as molecules in a liquid. It de-personalises, even de-humanises the people we are talking about and makes it easier for us to see them as a threat, even as enemies.

All these remarks bring us back to the dehumanising and anti-democratic language of contemporary migration, a language that repeatedly depicts the new forms of enslavement of thousands of people crossing the Mediterranean to reach the small island of Lampedusa in terms of “massive influx,” “mass immigration,” “human tsunami,” “boat-people” thus symbolically and visually conveying the idea of identical modules in a liquid carried along in flows, streams and waves. This combination of dehumanising language and antidemocratic border practice is what Foucault (1972) called a discourse, or *discursive formation*, which generates meaning and produces knowledge. This particular discourse of migration helps to make it possible for states, governments and the publics of host countries, especially rich Northern ones, to respond to migrants not as individual human beings, people like us, embedded in contingent social and historical circumstances, but as anonymous and dehumanised masses that portray the Mediterranean as paradigmatic of a new transnational dis/order. In particular, endorsing what has been termed a “mobilities perspective” or “mobilities paradigm” (Hannam et al. 2006), the new metaphors of the Mediterranean mentioned here not only put into question the concepts of democracy, hospitality, community, transnationalism, sea boundary/border/margin, but shape new sea(e)scapes in which the Mare Nostrum has overcome geographical boundaries and has turned itself into a human unit, a historic personality, a place loaded with symbolic representations (as, certainly, has always been). As stated by Paola Zaccaria in *La lingua che ospita*:

Se pensatori e teorici non eurocentrici come Gilroy o bell hooks o Glissant o Anzaldúa sono intenti, a causa della condizione di postcolonialismo o postsegregazionismo o creolità, a intessere pensieri e parole dell’Occidente con pensieri e parole delle culture complesse entro cui si sono ritrovati a vivere, la nostra Italia che ormai incontra la differenza ad ogni angolo di strada ... non riesce ancora a prendere in considerazione e ancor meno entrare in rapporto con le lingue, le culture, e tanto meno i soggetti ravvisati come ‘portatori della diversità.’ (15)

Indeed, considering the actual critical socio-political state on the Southern Italian coasts and the diffusion of such an anti-democratic language worldwide—through the threads of our translational warp as defined by Appadurai’s “scapes”—the formulation of a new theoretical and public vocabulary to talk about what we have called “new sea(e)scapes” is urgently needed. New narratives should indeed be created, to substitute abused linguistic and conceptual constructs which either romanticize or dehumanize real people and their stories. In his discussion of the terms frontier, boundaries and hybrids, in 1997, Hannerz had already remarked that: “We need these words ourselves ... to map the changes, and we should remember old keywords and the past comments on them, to know from where we have come, and to sense if we have moved much forward” (15).

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CRISTINA TINELLI

FROM “THE MYSTERIES OF THE HYPHEN” TO THE MYSTERIES OF ITALY:  
THE POETRY OF SANDRA M. GILBERT

Sandra M. Gilbert is best known for her seminal works of feminist literary criticism, most notably for the groundbreaking studies she co-authored with Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the three volumes of *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, and for a rich body of work on British and American authors. Yet, despite her acclaimed success as a literary thinker, Gilbert considers herself primarily a poet and then a scholar, and on various occasions she has stressed her own commitment to poetry. In defense of this dual activity she wrote a provocative essay in 2002 entitled “Of the Living Dead: the Poet-Critic in an Age of Theory,” published in *On Burning Ground*, the volume which constitutes her ongoing meditation on verse.<sup>1</sup> In this essay she laments the fact that the longstanding tradition of the poet/critic seems to have vanished in the academic establishment. According to her, this is the consequence of the institutionalization of literary studies that shifted the position of poets and creative writers to the margins of critical thinking.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, these two activities now seem to be rather oxymoronic (a poet is certainly not a literary critic, and writing poetry is commonly held to be nothing more than a pastime for a scholar).

Yet in her long distinguished career one has complemented the other: “I am myself both a poet and a critic, I feel keenly the responsibilities of cultural analysis and aesthetic evaluation” (*BG* xiv); or rather, to report her own opinion, she thinks that her literary criticism is so eccentrically theoretical and metaphorical because she is a poet (see Gilbert in Brogan 400).

Sandra M. Gilbert is also what Linda Hutcheon would define a “crypto-ethnic” intellectual (see “A Crypto-Ethnic Confession”). Her studies on women writers have canonized a new—or we might say untold—tradition, but have never entered the Italian American debate. Conversely, her Italian American identity powerfully informs her poetry and memoirs.

Gilbert was raised as an American child surrounded by a large set of relatives with an accent. And she welcomed her wedding to a Jewish professor that would add an anglicized surname to a visible sign of her ethnic origin—her middle surname Mortola that she abbreviates to an “M.” in all her publications—although she was later to declare that she had never thought of its identitarian implications.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter cited as *BG*.

<sup>2</sup> In that she seems implicitly to hint at the fact that criticism on her poetic output is rather scanty and is mostly limited to the reviews of her latest published collection.

<sup>3</sup> See “Mysteries of the Hyphen. Poetry, Pasta and Identity Politics,” (*BG* 44-45), the Introduction to Helen Barolini’s *The Dream Book* (22), and the interview by Brogan (416).

In her essays she returns again and again to her “controversial” Italian-ness, but also to the “reasons [that] shape what and how [someone] writes” (“Why Do We Write” *BG* 4). On this issue she likes to identify with the girl from Stevens’s poem “The Idea of Order at Key West,” and admits that as a poet she too is “driven by the ‘maker’s rage to order words of the sea, / Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred, / And of ourselves and of our origins, / In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds”” (*BG* 5). All these elements, the necessity to give an order to “the words of the fragrant portals” and to the words “of ourselves and of our origins,” and how these provide “ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds” are key phrases through which we can interpret not only her Italian American poetry but also how her crypto-ethnicity becomes the elective space where the poet and the critic meet.

Since 1979, the year of her first book of verses *In the Fourth World*, she has published nine collections of poetry. In her rich output, aesthetic research and formal technique allow her to explore a wide range of genres, from the dramatic monologue to the sonnet or the elegy.

If on the one hand she claims that for a poet “creative imagination” has to be “gender free,” on the other, most of the subjects of her poems are predictable exploited topoi in feminist creative works: the desire of stasis and the fear of freedom (in Plath-ian terms), the introspective and visceral contemplation of the self and the urgency compelled by it, the metonymic representation of the female body and the complexity of the female psyche, the revisited personification of myths and fairy tales, but also the relentless re-elaboration of grief and loss. Yet, her poetry, which is strongly physical, intense, and sensory, remains distinctly individual. It is not overtly polemical, or steely and implacably ironic like most feminist poetry.<sup>4</sup> Her polemical vein is fused into her genial voice; she constructs verses that are at the same time “narrative, or metaphorical, or iconographic in some sense” (Brogan 406), which engage both the mind and the senses and where irony often deflates both pathos and clichés.

In 2003, Gilbert gathered most of her previously published verses dealing with her Italian American identity in a book entitled *The Italian Collection*.<sup>5</sup> In these poems Italy acquires a mythic stature, which is another exploited issue in Italian American poetry, though in Gilbert’s work it seems to develop on specific axes: temporal, spatial and psychological. Time is annulled, space is allegorized, and in the intersection of both, the self creates its own *doppelgänger*.

In the coexistence of these layers of interpretations Italy becomes a kind of lost Eden and a remote “glamorous center of otherness” (*IC*). As she herself states in the famous essay “Mysteries of the Hyphen. Poetry, Pasta and Identity Politics”:

But the Italian part of my hyphen-nation looms most grandly, tragically, glamorously and persistently over the politics of my identity, and therefore it is to Italy as a country and a concept as a lost land and a sometimes lost, sometimes found history, that I have turned again and again in poetry and more generally in that struggle toward self-discovery of which poetry is a crucial element for me. (*BG* 41)

Italy ought to reconcile her search for roots to its rugged, almost incomprehensible topography. The old dusty, knotty landscape of Sicily is the projection of her aging

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<sup>4</sup> Her poetry can only apparently be equated to that “exoskeletal style: hard, steely, implacably ironic” that Alicia Ostriker indicated as characterizing most feminist poetry (587).

<sup>5</sup> Hereafter cited as *IC*.

body, and ancestors return only to mirror and distort—as Diane Raptosh claims (153)—the depth of the self.

"In the Golden *Sala*" lends itself to multiple readings: the landscape is fierce and blinding, the light of Agrigento frets sea and cliffs. The abandoned palace where her Sicilian grandmother "camped" with her large family retains the vestiges of its own opulent past. Everything is glittering, but all this gold shines only for the sake of the new poor occupants, both humans and animals—"gold railings where her laundry hung, / gold curtains, new eggs under them" (3). And it continues as follows:

"Mama was a midwife, knew  
everything about herbs and births.  
The peasant women came from farms around Palermo  
so she could help them."  
On floors still streaked with gold  
she made them spaces  
in the dazzling spaces where the prince one walked.  
Gold of forgotten dances, tattered rugs.

When a new baby slid out in a splash of water  
he must have looked up, dazed,  
toward the prince's Apollonian light,  
and the black eyes of the midwife  
and the black eyes of the midwife's nine black-haired children  
would have looked quizzically down,  
as if from a high cliff by the sea  
hot and yellow with new poppies. (4)

In Gilbert's own vision, the palace becomes "in anthropological terms, a kind of liminal zone, a place where nature and culture collide in willful clashes over destiny" (*BG* 48).

The Sicilian grandmother is a Muse of sorts, in tune with Gilbert's feminist commitment to matrilineage, but it is clear that her presence sets in motion very diverse anthropological and psychological issues. Gilbert's female ancestors, real and imagined, can be easily equated to those familiar archetypal figures that develop the emotional condition of the migrant woman. The various Persephones and Demeters are the Italian immigrant "goddesses" guarding the family's hearth and home and, as myths of rebirth, they assume a paradigmatic role for the Italian American woman when she attempts to come to terms with her own torn condition. In "Confessional Mythology", Gilbert states that the meaning of mythology for practicing poets is "both more obvious and more radical" than common definitions would suggest:

Neither evasive nor sacred, these dreamlike events whose history we all so strangely share seem to me to be opaque or ambiguous surfaces that let us all see ourselves the only way we can—in a glass, darkly. Inevitably, then, no matter how objective it may seem, mine is always a confessional mythology, and I imagine this is true for many, if not for most, other poets. (14)

Gilbert's midwife grandmother—more than a myth of rebirth, this is a woman who enacts the precious rite of giving birth—is the one "endowed with a mystical mastery of origins," ("Mysteries of the Hyphen" 42) and thus deputed to guide the poet in her journey of discovery into the self.

She returns in the famous poem entitled "The Grandmother Dream" and her presence becomes even more uncanny:

My Sicilian grandmother, whom I've never met,  
 my Sicilian grandmother, the midwife, who died  
 forty years ago, appears in my bedroom.  
 She's sitting on the edge of my bed,  
 at her feet a shabby black bag,  
 and she speaks a tangled river of Italian:  
 her Sicilian words flow out like dark fish, slippery and cold,  
 her words stare at me with blank eyes.

I see that she's young, younger than I am.  
 I see her black hair gleam like tar as  
 she draws from her small black midwife's bag  
 her midwife tools: heavy silver instruments  
 polished like doorknobs, polished—misshapen, peculiar—  
 like the knobs of an invisible door. (5)

The grandmother is surrounded by darkness, everything about her is black, but out of the remote past from which she emerges she is surprisingly younger than the poet. Through this well-known motif of the parent being younger than the child, the cyclical renewal of life occupies that moment in time in which her past history and future desire meet. The dream is providing the poet with clues: she needs to go through the opposite assimilation process if she does not want to be haunted by her ethnic immigrant past. The search for roots reveals an alienation from a language that most of her relatives speak but she does not. In fact, the message passed down to the poet is made of words that swim like dark, cold slippery fish and, through a pure surrealist synesthesia, these words stare at her “with blank eyes.”

Language remains the dark ancestral river which she still has to start traveling upstream. The only shining things are her grandmother's polished tools that, like the knobs of an invisible door, should introduce her to the mysteries of Italy. But the poet is not ready to pass that threshold yet.

It is when the poet meets her double in Italy that she starts to be reconciled to her own origin. The title is “Anna la Noia,” and in this poem Gilbert explicitly pays homage to Ungaretti's “Alla noia.”

*La mano le luceva che mi porse. . .*  
 —G. Ungaretti, “Alla Noia”

She was the sister I never had,  
 a pale Italian girl from the dry, olive-gray  
 hills of Tuscany—

*Anna La Noia*

*Anne Ennui*

with eyes like seeds  
 focusing hard and sharp  
 on a darkness I couldn't see.

At dawn she appeared  
 in a white shift  
 like a novice, a nurse's aide  
 beside my bed:

high milkless breasts, high child's voice,  
 cool skin, indifferent wrists. . .

We gossiped in the early heat,  
made up old stories, poems, lies:  
in the half-light  
that leaked around the shutters  
she held out a shining hand—

*Anna La Noia*

*Anne Ennui. . .*

I pressed my lips against small  
knuckles cold as pebbles.  
What was it I remembered then?  
Now, what have I forgotten?

.....

At noon in the simmering vineyard  
we embraced,  
we became one woman. (33-34)

The line quoted in the epigraph is translated by Gilbert as "she held out a shining hand"; both in Ungaretti's and Gilbert's poems the personification of the *ennui* appears at dawn and brings clarity to the poet's mind as the day progresses. In Ungaretti's words: "Noia, nel senso di inquietudine (*l'ennui* francese, il cruccio) [è] uno stato stimolante di sospensione e di disagio da cui si vorrebbe uscire" (537), not because of something painful, but in response to something seen or intuited. This intuition is not only a state of poetic inspiration, but is also a creative impulse that fills a void; it is the source of history and thus the parent of memory itself (see Moevs 220). When *l'ennui* disappears, a new memory is left behind. All the elements that are present in Ungaretti's hermetic poem are further developed by Gilbert. Her disquietude is personified in her anti-self, who can pierce that darkness that her American part cannot.

Anna La Noia has substituted her grandmother at the side of the bed and, like her, she is still a spectral creature, she is a "ghostly demarcation." But like a young virgin vestal dressed in white, she will accompany the poet through the morning in her process of knowledge, and the poet will accept her guidance (her "shining hand") as if it were an initiation into the mystery. They will gossip and make up old stories, poems and lies, and Anna La Noia will also help her cross the tangled linguistic—and cultural—river that had always prevented her from completely internalizing her origin.

The speaker is fully mirrored now in her Italian double, but in another poem "2085," another double reaches even further to embrace the history of Italian Americans.

Here the poet addresses a girl of seventeen with black curls by saying "you are my blood." The girl is walking on a dirty road in Sicily, in a future landscape that seems to have been crystallized by time: the hills are dry and nearby are goats, donkeys and chickens, the smell of dung and *rosmarino*. While observing her, the speaker wonders if she has come from New York to find lost ancestors or if she has always been there, not knowing which part of the double she embodies:

.....

in the sky, a track of supersonic light—  
but you don't look up, you're reading, thinking,  
trying to imagine the past,

and my sentences won't help you, though they

brood in you like chromosomes:

I can't

tell you who I was, in my queer costume,  
with my modern ideas.

My words

stand in the fields beside you—  
stones, dead trees—the way  
the land you walk through

stood behind me, an unknown monument.  
And now the road unfolds and shines ahead  
like the history neither of us understands.

It turns you  
toward the sea, toward  
the inarticulate Aegean. (35-36)

Here, the poet seems to be accepting her Italian past both psychologically and emotionally, but she is also trying to read it and reflect on it in her attempt to grasp its innermost significance. The words of other people, who went through the same experience, won't help her, even though those words have been almost genetically passed down to her like DNA chromosomes. The intellectual contribution of gender, ethnic and regional studies—and therefore of Gilbert's scholarly work, ("my queer costume," "my modern ideas")—will be useless like dead trees. Indeed, the experience remains individual, each American of Italian origin has to go through it alone because this land remains "an unknown monument."

Neither the poet, who has now become the ancestor, nor the descendant have understood their history, yet, even though it still shines ahead of them, like the knob of that dream-door or like Anna La Noia's hand.

Their hermeneutic journey finally leads them toward that sea Italian immigrants crossed in the past. Interestingly, Gilbert mentions the Aegean, a sea that does not bound Sicily but which constitutes the cradle of Western civilization and myth. Yet, even that sea can't provide any "idea of order." The myth is still unsaid, "the words of the fragrant portals," "the words of ourselves and of our origin" are unspoken, and the Aegean remains inarticulated.

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FLUTUR TROSHANI

‘*POIESIS* OF SOUNDS IN THE WIND’:  
A GLIMPSE INTO TRANS-AESTHETIC INNOVATION/RENOVATION

What is particularly interesting with John Cayley’s “transliterated morphing” is that it centralizes around aesthetic and taxonomic concerns of poetry in the digital medium, thus raising questions crucial to the innovative techniques of using materiality in New Media. Issues such as literariness, programming, inscription, aesthetic practices, autonomy and self-reference are thrust to the foreground. In this paper, I look at the literary aspect—the literariness—of transliterated morphing, examples of which are “Windsound” and “Overboard,” and argue that literariness should be understood in terms of performance *per se*, inscribed inside an ever-shifting dynamics of being/becoming, negotiation/re negotiation and innovation/renovation. In this sense, although it goes beyond the scope of this paper, literariness relates to other forms of experimental non-digital poetry.

As the title suggests, literariness gets trans-aesthetically articulated inside a system of innovation/renovation that has prompted a greater awareness of how the medium’s materiality participates in the construction of the text’s artistic beauty and, above all, how the text becomes a transient event, built in time, irrevocable and, at the same time, unique. On that account, the works’ interpretation, both thematic and aesthetic, provides an opportunity to investigate with much more rigor their inner workings.

*“Windsound”/“Overboard”*: Thematic Concerns

Looking at literariness in terms of performance implies, as a first step, inquiring into how the inner workings of these pieces have been orchestrated. In fact, when John Cayley programmed them, he intended them to be some kind of quasi-objects with a life of their own, what he calls “dynamic linguistic ‘wall-hanging’” (Hayles et al., 2006). He meant to have them play by themselves in such ways that they would “evoke or engage attention,” just as a painting hanging on a wall does, or as he puts it, as “scrolling feeds would.”

“Windsound” is intended to be watched as a QuickTime “object-movie.” As the piece runs on for twenty-three minutes, the viewer/reader sees “animated text,” foregrounded white in black, in the background. Also, a “low-level” audio-track can be heard, which recorded live on Hypercard, brings in the confusion of a breaking storm: the “noise of a blustering wind with snatches of conversation, clattering, clicking noises and the occasional buzz of traffic clicking in” (Picot “The Curator’s Egg”).

The breaking storm is counterposed by two distinct software-generated voices, male and female, the volumes of which alternate from high to relatively low, and conversely. Although the voices should read aloud the text that appears on screen, seldom, do the

reading session and the “animated text” follow the same pace. Rather, much more often, the typology of the text breaks down, just as the progression of the reading session dwindles away, so that what we hear and what we read are often desynchronized, at times, even creating contrapuntal configurations.

Cayley has inserted into the system several “nodal” texts with some kind of “narrative and fictional boundaries,” which are dispersed as the texts are worked out by a relatively-simple, yet carefully contrived, software-generated algorithm. To understand how the algorithm works, the viewer/reader should think of an input source table, containing the “nodal texts,” and an output target table, displaying the screens in-between them. By itself, the algorithm is a loop that works out the texts letter-by-letter for 28 different units (26 letters of the alphabet, 1 space and 1 apostrophe). The task of the loop is to find the shortest distance from source to target table. 14 steps can be performed (clockwise and anti-clockwise) from source to target. At first, the morph is probabilistically reluctant to change, but, when set in time, it becomes anxious, more notably so, as the letters come closer to the target.

Cayley first wrote the “nodal” texts and only afterwards inputted them into the system as ready-mades. The following is a screen containing a “nodal” text (fig. 1).

Deep inside this text, there is romantic striving, cast in somewhat schematic tones, on the speaker’s account, to take in the wind’ sound and commit it as one’s own, (“I’ve always / thought of it / as ‘my’ sound”), albeit surreptitiously as in (“I’d never / thought of it / like that, as / ‘secret’ / though I enjoy it / ‘secretly’). As the text progresses, however, from the first to the last stanza, it gradually depletes itself of its meaning; thus, at the end, the poem deflects sententially, (“...you have to be— / to stay / ‘silent’ / to hear it). It is as if the poem were in search of some kind of dictum or inescapable truth brought in by the wind, even though only in fantasy.

Worked out by the algorithm, this “nodal” text, no longer discreet and self-contained, shifts into a rapid procession of screens until the next “nodal” text coalesces. The following is one of these screens, in which the text has shifted into new configurations (fig. 2).

The words here have started to deflect into discreet letters. e (first line), t, l, e, tt, (second line), ee, te, e (third line), e,e (fourth line), te,e,t,e,e (fifth line), e (sixth line), ee (seventh line), t (tenth line) slip into new postures, gradually, as the text collapses under the working of the algorithm, from bottom up, at what Cayley calls, a more “granular level.”

Pushing further “Windsound”’s conceptual paradigm, “Overboard” inflates in much more decisive terms the identity of the text. Here the text has become more permeable, both in its internal operations and external exposure. As Cayley explains, it is still based on letters that are “transcribed in machine-encoded alphabetic script,” but unlike “Windsound,” the morphing of the letters occurs at a much more basic level. Their replacement is based on some kind of holographic principle: two letters substitute one another only if similar acoustically and/or graphically. This strategic move attends upon the substitution of the letters in a less dramatic and “minimal” way: “ideally such that the changes would be barely perceptible. The piece would seem not to change and yet always be different, whenever it was given any attention” (Cayley, “Overboard”).

The texts of every screen in “Overboard” are set in stanzaic “monospaced font” cast in “fixed width,” in such way that the letters of the “notional grid” have “regular fixed positions.” The alphabetic text, on the right, is duplicated by its visual correlative—photos of the sea—on the left side of each screen. As the piece plays, both letters and images, alternate in quick procession, one after the other; nevertheless, they

do keep the same font placements and distances in-between as below (fig. 3):

Here, both alphabetic text and image-correlatives, make two parallels that, as time elapses, respond to one another dynamically and perceptively.

Inside the work's operating system, Cayley has inserted his own adaptation in verses of an incident recounted in William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which tells about a man being thrown overboard into the sea and then hauled back onboard. Although not in its finalized state, the text can be read in the screen below (fig. 4):

Cayley explains that "Overboard," as "screen-based work produces successively a set of three metaphorically implicated textual states." He calls them surfacing, sinking and drowning.<sup>1</sup>

"During the surfacing stage, as the algorithm scans the text, the letters gradually start to appear on screen." After the text has completely surfaced—has become fully intelligible—it deliberately, as time elapses, starts to sink—it becomes less intelligible—until it fully drowns—it becomes fully unintelligible. As the piece runs, this nuanced interplay among stages is accompanied by experimental generative music in the background, composed by Giles Perring.

Thematically, both "Windsound" and "Overboard" are concerned with permeating turns between legibility and illegibility in posing the question: how are we to understand the various terms in which legibility/illegibility presuppose one another, and most of all, how does this theme get invigorated in what is a rather ubiquitous, inter-medial practice?

In any case, both pieces set the terms for what can be called "priority of transaction": exploring not only the identity of letters, but also, and especially so, the processes that "eventuate" the letters—their coherence and utmost realness. The letters therefore come with their own differentials; their logic played out as they get orchestrated inside the inner-workings of the intermedia pieces.

### *Literariness: Interplaying Between Materiality and Signifying Strategies*

But if the text thematizes legibility/illegibility and makes it its own self-evolving paradigm both in its physical and symbolic stratification, how can the critic's analysis establish itself with regard to the text's literary aspect, to its literariness? By definition, the concept of literariness addresses the "materiality of language." It deals with "language," "made peculiarly conscious of itself as such—or, to put it another way, language which has been "made strange," so that it becomes newly *perceptible* to the reader or listener" (Eagleton 48, his emphasis). That is why, for the formalists, whatever kind of interaction that eventuates the literary texts is strictly linguistic. The possibilities for meaning are always intermediated through language, because language is the very medium through which the text gets articulated.

As far as concerns "Windsound" and "Overboard," however, their literariness rests on morphed letters, which are no longer one-to-one correspondents between signifiers (the perceptible) and signifieds (the intelligible). Significantly, morphed letters are inscribed in the underlying code—the morphing algorithm—which in turn instructs the machine to perform specific operations. What we see on screen is hence only the interfacing text emerging from these operations executed in a series of interrelated

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<sup>1</sup> John Cayley, "Overboard: An Example of Ambient Time-Based Poetics in Digital Art." 2 Apr. 2010 <[http:// www.dichtung-digital.org/2004/2-Cayley.htm](http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2004/2-Cayley.htm)>.

processes.

The morphing letters are “digital” and, at the same time, have “processual quality,” which needs to be “distinguished from the flat durable mark of print or the blast of air with oral speech.” Each letter therefore should be read as “deeply layered rather than flat, constantly replenished rather than durable, and highly mutable depending on processes mobilized by the layered code ... These qualities are not merely ornamental but enter profoundly into what marks the signifier and, more importantly, how they signify,” explains Hayles.<sup>2</sup>

Thereupon the question arises: how do morphed letters attend to their literary aspect, at a time when fundamental is “the nature of their medium”? Literariness is enacted as an open practice configuration, and, in the case of the morphed letters, it depends on their inter-mediality. Thus it is because of their inter-mediality that the morphed letters confer upon each other, their conference being perpetually unresolved as the piece runs in QuickTime.

### *Morphed Letters: Looking into their Experiential Potential*

The text with all its coalescing properties is not a neutral artifact. On the contrary, it comes (re) negotiated inside a dynamics that emerges from the nuanced interplay between materiality and signification strategies (Hayles). On that account, the literariness of the morphed letters is not a finalized product; rather it is a complex process of becoming.

In the following screen (fig. 5), the text, worked out by the underlying algorithm, has lost its gravitational field and hence its structural and semantic pulls, at the level of its interface. Its letters act like signifiers emptied of their signifieds; thus the words—made of morphed letters—have lost their signification. They do not mean anything; in a sense, they have ceased to be words.

In having lost their performative power, the words are incapable of enacting anything. Thereupon, as they shift discreetly from screen to screen, the letters obtain tonalities that, borrowing a term from Charles Altieri, are “unique aesthetic phenomena” (Altieri 76).

At their interfacing level, the morphed letters create a one-dimensional linguistic plane, where the textual junctures, instead of being hierarchical, have become simultaneous. At their very essence, I think, the morphed letters act as some kind of perceived transaction between the experiential potential that they carry when morphing from screen to screen and the actual textuality (screen text) in which they subsist. From this perspective, the letters’ reality as literary poetical practice and aesthetic phenomena is an invitation to look at the letters *per se*—probably in some kind of solipsistic contemplation.

As the piece progresses and its screens marshal one after the other, the hierarchical pulls of the text gradually start to coalesce. Full words begin to emerge in the screen below such as “taut,” “about,” (first line), “door and listens” (second line), “footsteps fade deep” (third line), “for a moment” (fourth line), “is” “until” (fifth line), “dry eyes” (sixth line), “table by” (seventh line), “to do” (eighth line), “from” “tanaka” “into” (ninth

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<sup>2</sup> N. Katherine Hayles. Interviewed by Lisa Gitelman. “‘Materiality Has Always Been in Play’: An Interview with N. Katherine Hayles.” 1 Apr. 2010 <[http://iowareview.uiowa.edu/TIRW/TIRW\\_Archive/tirweb/feature/hayles/NKHinterview.pdf](http://iowareview.uiowa.edu/TIRW/TIRW_Archive/tirweb/feature/hayles/NKHinterview.pdf)>.

line), "in" (tenth line), "one day" "to" "east" "nor" (eleventh line). The text here, alternating between intelligible/legible and unintelligible/ illegible, gradually begins to be observed and appreciated (fig. 6).

The whole process is finalized in the screen below (fig. 7), where the text has become fully intelligible. Here it has materialized in its full potential, but, gradually, as time elapses, the text will dissolve again to remain, but what will only be, an image in the mind.

This text is a reminiscent meditation, full of instabilities, which in turn "put certain norms of reading ... in question." Such instabilities show themselves, not only on a formal level—it is difficult to concentrate on the screen text specifically, because it gets played out by the underlying algorithm quite swiftly, but also on a semantic level - we do not know who Zhang is and where he is now. It seems as if the text is no longer in search of any transcendental truth, but rather discourses away ("one day to the east now...") as if foreclosed within its own self-referentiality.

In a way, this could be read as some kind of "linguistic recognition scene," which stumbles upon "the incidentality of the signifiers rather than the transcendental of the referent" (McCaffery qtd. in Perloff 10). Thus the type of reality that this work presents may be read as a "meditation on its own being in the world." It "may be identifiable and even beautiful," although at times it comes as "outstrip[ped]" from "understanding" (Howard 21).

### *Literariness and Asyntactic Grammar*

At the level of its interfacing, the text is symptomatically asyntactic. In the following screen for example (fig. 8), although the text has surfaced relatively well, the whole construction is not determined—its ontology prefixed by the working algorithm does not allow that—so the fixity of the syntactic links is only but an epistemological illusion. To understand "Overboard" better, therefore, it is necessary to opt for the kind of grammar that is basically asyntactic.

It is a kind of grammar that happens within the "ever-shifting of relations," instead of rooting in single words. It seems as if the nouns—"storms," "winds," "seas," "seil," "days," "man," "board," "sea," "fathoms," "water," "brim," "ship," "life"—dangle in equi-dependence—yet they come undone at the moment when they have coalesced. All along the process, their relations between meanings, meaning and interfacing form, and between different grammatical categories become unstable and undecidable.

Asyntactic grammar is free and provisionally (un)settles itself, as it happens, in its very performance. At heart, it consorts together fragments of a phrase, for instance, on a simultaneous, horizontal plane, instead of a hierarchical, vertical one. Intended in this sense, asyntactic grammar in "Overboard"—and "Windsound" for that matter—acts as some kind of performative semantics that is deeply, perhaps irreducibly, experiential.

During the whole process, the texts become "normative" in the sense that they disconcert—"identif[y], if [they] do not stigmatize" the poems' "dissociative impulse." The poems' "dissociative impulse" obliterates expectation and confuses, "bewilder[s], baffle[s], defeats and disconcerts." One could argue thus that the whole pieces are experiments in experimentation, intending the texts as "simultaneous structure[s], impersonal, autonomous, released from the charge of expression [and] of [any sort] of assertion" (Howard 20).

Within the context of this conference, "Democracy and Difference: The US in

Multidisciplinary and Comparative Perspectives,” both works, “Windsound” and “Overboard,” seem to inevitably lead us into sophisticated discussions of rhetorical stance and poetical coverage to resist homogenization and to embrace multiple discourses and sensibilities that are not conveyed through literary and stylistic sedimentations. Hence, Cayley’s innovative poetical use of the technique of “transliterated morphing,” as a matter of fact, along with the full complement of literary tropes can be used as a model to understand how poetry can assimilate the advantages and resist the limitations that the digital medium brought in. On that account, “Windsound” and “Overboard” seem to have the facility to transcend limitations and to speak to contemporaries about innovation/renovation in new and stimulating ways.

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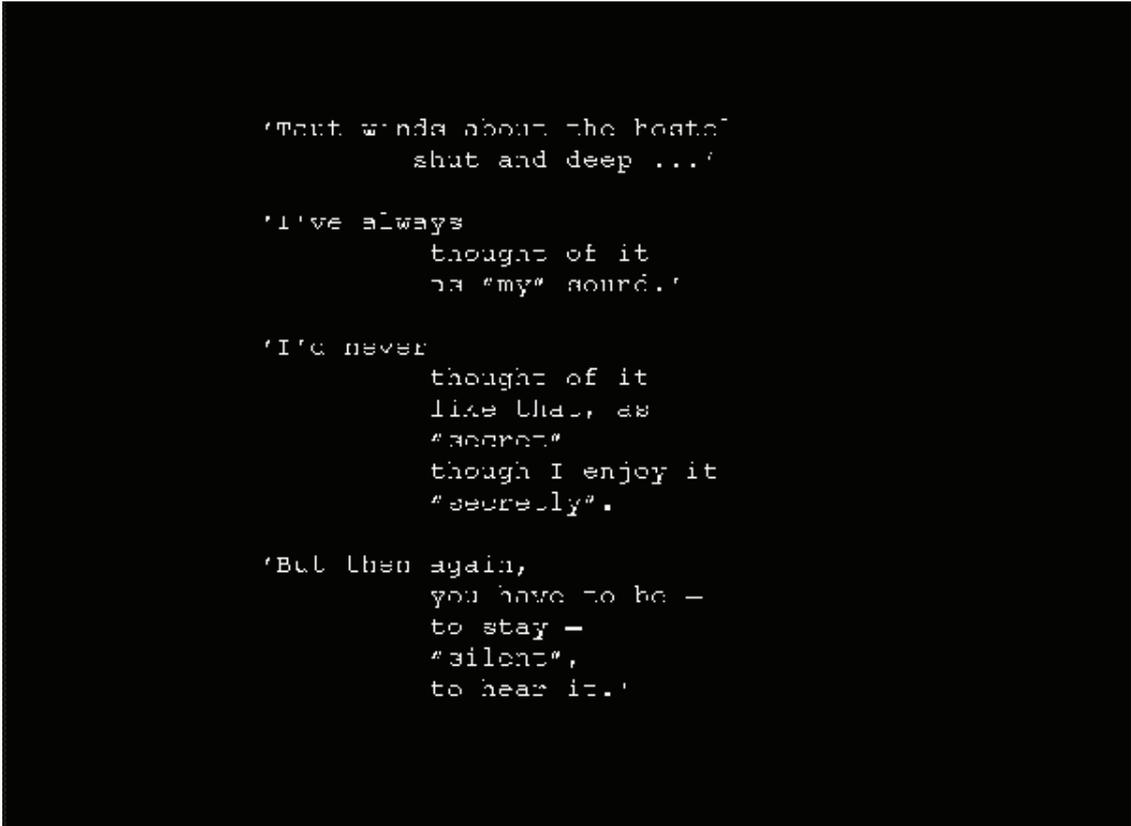


Fig. 1

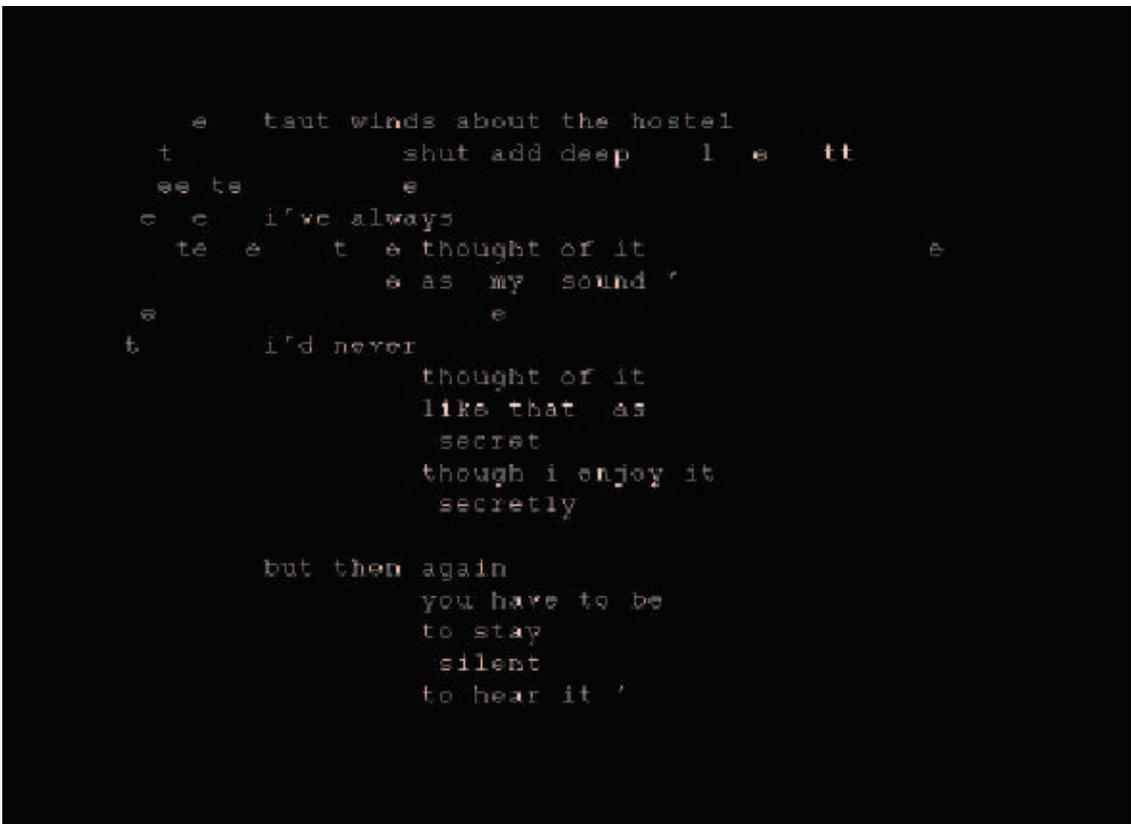


Fig. 2

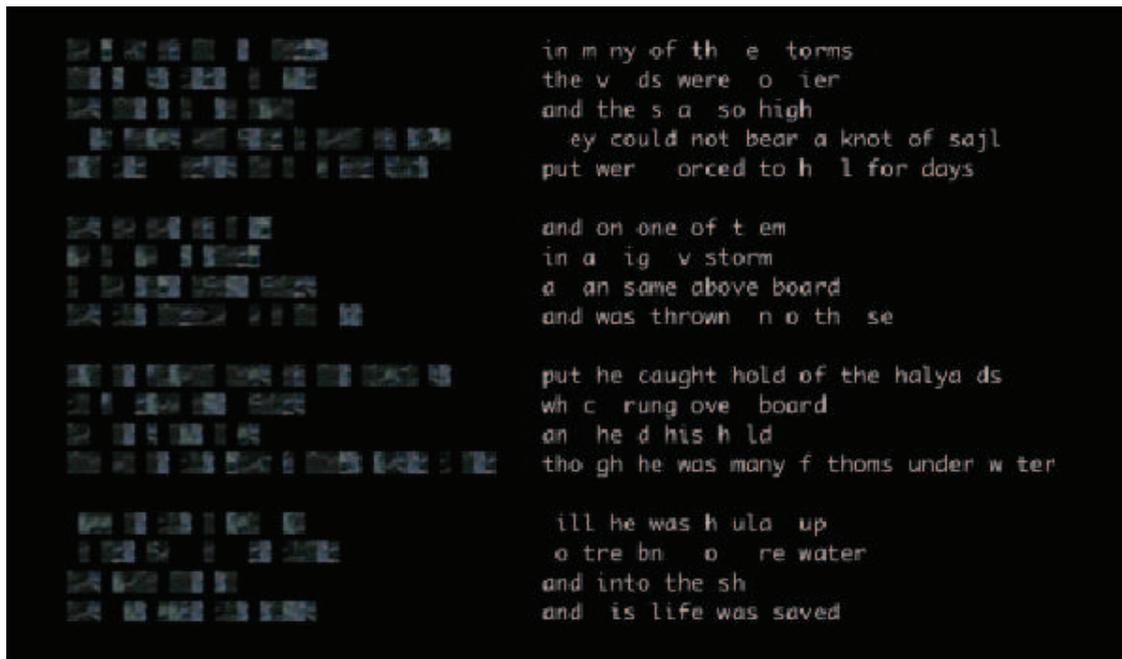


Fig. 3

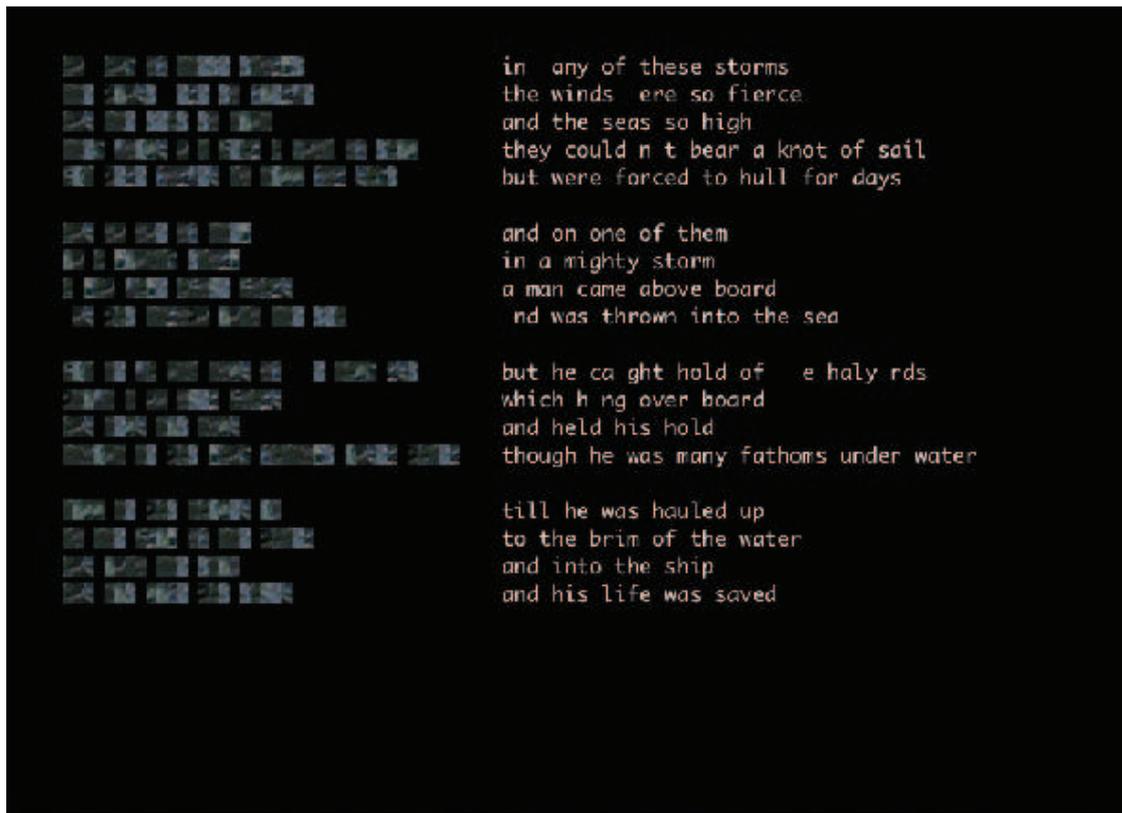


Fig. 4



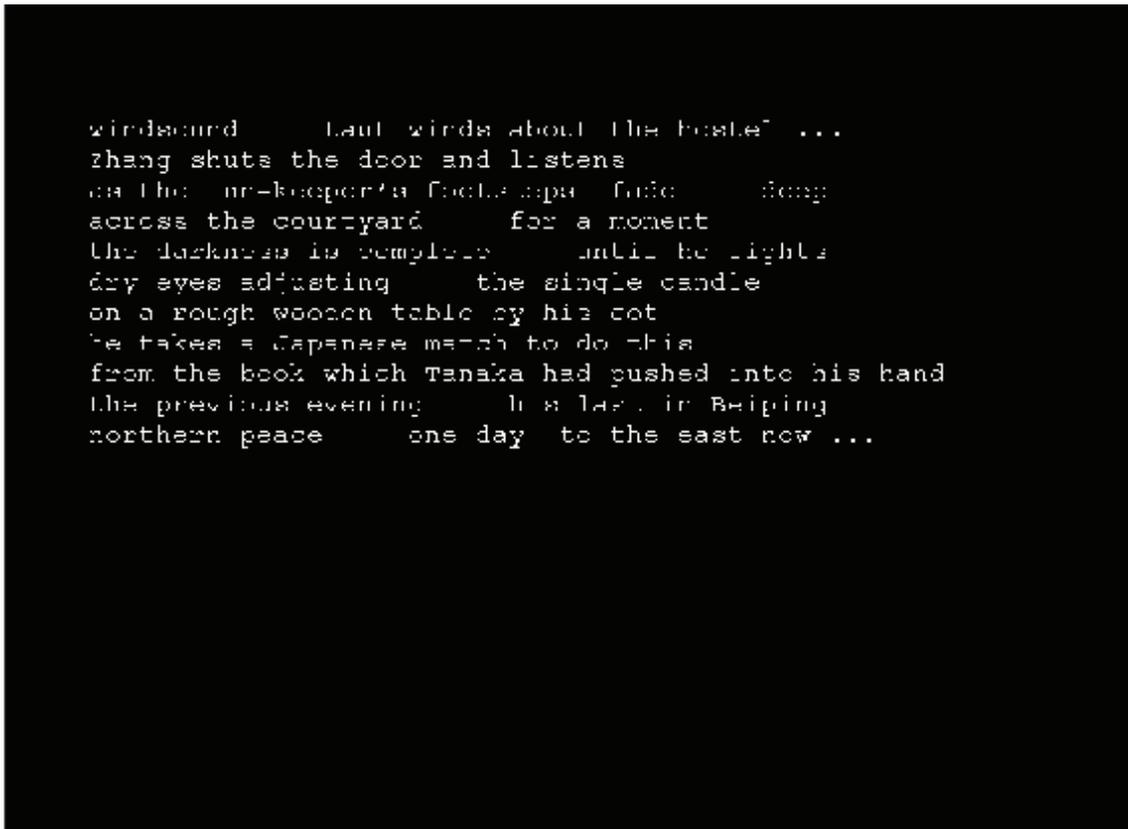


Fig. 7

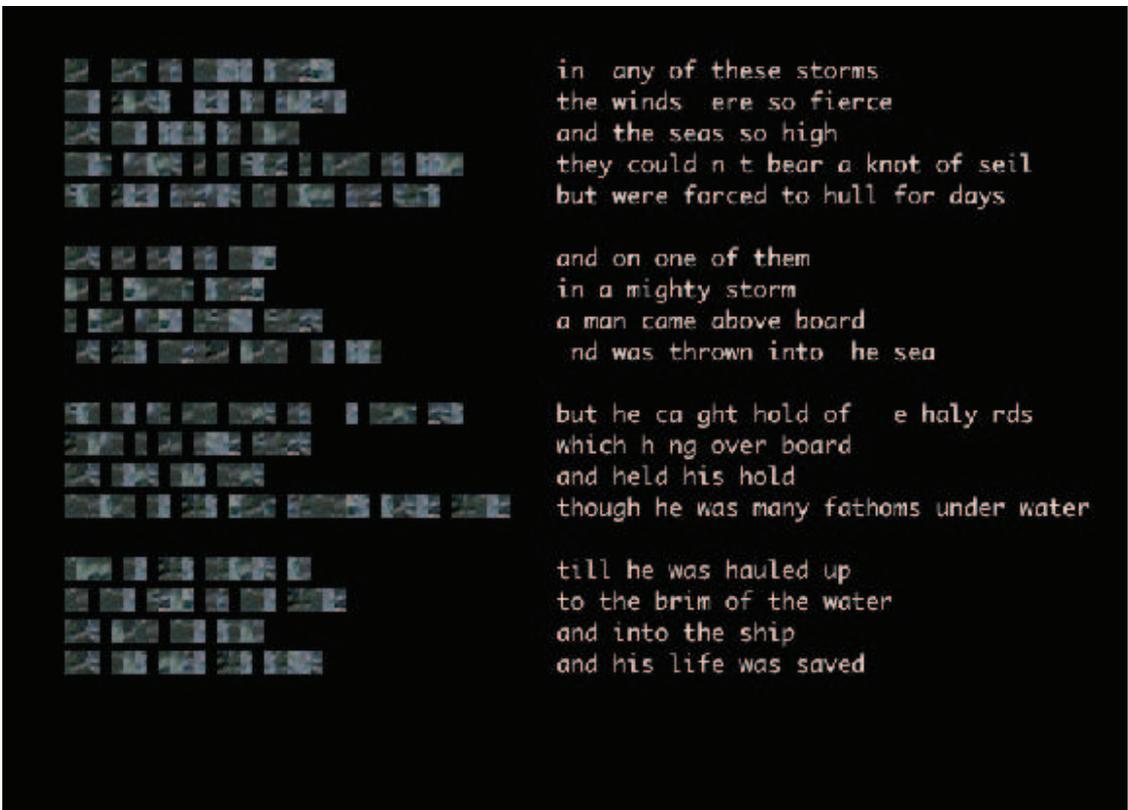


Fig. 8

MIRELLA VALLONE

BORDERS, CROSSROADS, BRIDGES: NEGOTIATING BOUNDARIES

Encouraging a greater familiarity between the new cultural geography and American literary studies, Sara Blair defined the end of the millennium as a posthistorical era, one in which “temporality as the organizing form of experience has been superseded by spatiality, the affective and social experience of space” (544). Indeed, contrary to what many theorists feared, our global era of transnational flows, deterritorialization of people and images, border crossings and imagined communities “has actually made place more important, not less” (Halttunen, 2), although it has prompted a necessary reconceptualization of what place and place making are. American ethnic literature has always shown a great awareness of the processes of space production and has used space to articulate issues of cultural memory, personal identity, national belonging, class, ethnicity, and race. Spatial configuration, on the other hand, is the means through which “racisms become institutionally normalized ... just as social space is made to seem natural, a given, by being conceived and defined in racial terms” (Goldberg 185). The closing of the American frontier and the massive migratory movements during the early twentieth century were accompanied by the necessity of re-thinking “inner spaces,” by a need for borders in order to contain and confine immigrants and maintain racial and class hierarchy. The inclusion of new groups, such as Mexicans and Asians, challenged the vision of Jefferson’s “homogeneous America” and Franklin’s “society of the lovely white” (Takaki 82). Ethnic enclaves such as barrios, Chinatowns, black inner cities became sites of difference, estrangement, as well as, cultural resistance. As Zygmunt Bauman argues: “the tendency to communal enclosure is prompted and encouraged in both directions,” that is, “the separation and ghettoization of ‘alien elements’ ... in turn reverberate in the impulse to self-estrangement and self-enclosure of the forcefully ghettoized group” (103). San Francisco Chinatown, for example, emerged in the late nineteenth century in response to intense periods of anti-Chinese violence, but the clustering of Chinese immigrants in “ethnic islands” reinforced a notion of essential cultural differences, confirming views of the Chinese as inassimilable and undesirable immigrants. The creation of the racialized “Other” and his spatial segregation served to reinforce the borders of Euro-American identity, to define notions of American-ness in a Euro-American model, as well as, to define the terms of American citizenship. The history of Asian immigration to the US is particularly significant, under this point of view:

in the last century and half, the American *citizen* has been defined over against the Asian *immigrant*, legally, economically, and culturally. These definitions have cast Asian immigrants both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their alien origins. (Lowe 4)

The confinement of negatively racialized populations is symmetrical to their positioning outside the healthy national imaginary and speaks to the “coloniality of place” (Kandiyoti 33). Indeed, the creation of reservations and “inner cities” can be considered a form of internal colonialism that perpetuates the racialist discourse of civilization based on putative differences of whites and others.

American ethnic literature has always shown a deep awareness and critique of spatial coloniality, challenging the conceptualization of place as a healing site of continuity, as is the case of two well-known novels, *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Sandra Cisneros and *Bone* (1993) by Fae Myenne Ng, which face complex cultural issues mostly through the representation and analysis of place—respectively a barrio of a great American city and San Francisco Chinatown. The spatial confinement of the locations of the novels, that is, the choice of the ethnic enclave as unity of place, is the mirror through which both novelists examine other kinds of confinement people who live there are subjected to—social, class, domestic, and emotional, as well as the immobilization into unchanging ideas and stereotypes by the dominant cultural imagination. The novels, thus, question American mainstream spatial discourse, connoted by openness, opportunity, and expansion, by providing a clear critique of the myth of the American Dream, and propose strategies of decolonization of the space of the ethnic enclave. The titles of the novels, in the light of the stories narrated in them, are emblematic, in this regard. The small red house on Mango Street, finally bought by the Cordero family, after frequent moving, with its tight steps in front, small windows, bricks crumbling in places, is very different from the white house with trees around it, a big yard and large windows promised by the parents to their children. The lie of the parents that the house on Mango Street reveals to Esperanza (“But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all”) is symbolic of a larger lie—that of America—that did not keep its promise of better life and economic success. Yet, the parents in Cisneros’s novel can endure their lives of hard work and dislocation only by keeping their hopes alive, by endlessly deferring the American dream. The promises of America are painfully broken for Leon, the father of the Leong family in *Bone*, who curses “this lie of a country” for “making big promises and breaking every one” (Ng 100). The title of Ng’s novel refers to the oldtimers’ desire to have their bones sent back to China for proper burial and final rest. In the novel, Grandpa Leong’s bones, because of his paper son’s forgetfulness, got lost and mixed with other bones; the oldtimers’ bones, unmarked by proper names, remain homeless and anonymous, thus perpetuating the sense of dislocation that characterized the lives of these immigrants. The title of the novel refers, also, to the broken bones and shattered body of Ona, Leon’s second daughter, a member of the supposed “lucky generation” (Ng 33), who jumped from the thirteenth floor of a building in Chinatown. As Juliana Chang persuasively argues, Grandpa Leong’s bones and Ona’s shattered body are the most palpable figures of “melancholic remains” in the novel, used by Ng to symbolize the contradictions and ruptures of Asian immigration to the USA and the intergenerational transmission of it. They represent “what is in excess of the national symbolic, what remains after national history and national subjectivity are narrated through modern trajectories of development and progress” (Chang 111).

Beside revealing the illusory character of the American dream for old and recent immigrants, the novels escape any representation of second-generation “easy” assimilation and Americanization. On the contrary, both novels foreground the painful and difficult process of the construction of an ethnic identity. Through their narrators, Esperanza and Leila, who are second-generation daughters, and through other characters

(Leila's sisters and the women in the barrio) the authors present an array of coping strategies through which these women attempt to reconcile distinct cultural and social spaces, often without succeeding.

The trajectories of development and progress are opposed by both novelists not only in content but also by the adoption of narrative structures that break the direction of temporality, contrasting the arrow of time: Sandra Cisneros wrote a series of vignettes that, in her intention, can be read singularly and at random point without having any knowledge of what came before or after; Fae Myenne Ng organized the narrative by a reverse chronology, that is, each subsequent chapter takes place at the moment prior to the events of the preceding chapter, following the threads of Leila's memory in search for the cause of her sister's suicide. Both novels in the final pages circle back to the opening.

The choice of first person narrators who speak of their lives in the ethnic enclave is the means through which Cisneros and Ng provide the readers with "the inside story" (Ng 141), that is, with a realistic and sympathetic view from within that counteracts the immobilizing, unsympathetic or Orientalizing external look of the dominant cultural imagination, thus proving itself a decolonizing strategy. For Esperanza, the young protagonist of *The House on Mango Street*, life in the barrio, a place where "there is too much sadness and not enough sky" (Cisneros 33), is characterized by a deep sense of displacement, one that in different ways and gradations she shares with the daughters of the Leong family in *Bone*. They, in fact, experience their lives in the neighborhood differently from their parents. The space of the ethnic enclaves are largely shaped after remembered places which have often served as "symbolic anchors of community" (Gupka and Ferguson 11) for dispersed people. So, while their borders are permeable to the languages, spatial memories and histories of other places—Mexico and China in the novels in question—they seem insurmountable against the confining physical, social and cultural space of mainstream America. Esperanza has inherited the dichotomy between inside and outside the ethnic enclave, with all its connotations, but from the beginning of her process of self-discovery she seems eager to transcend it. Her thoughts about her name are emblematic of the tensions between conflicting identifications she is caught in: "In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing" (Cisneros 10). Esperanza was named after her great-grandmother, who was a "wild horse of a woman" but was tamed by her husband and spent her whole life looking out the window, "the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (Cisneros 11). Esperanza has inherited her great-grandmother's name, but does not want to inherit her place by the window and gives voice to her desire to baptize herself under a new name, "a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (Cisneros 11). Esperanza's initial reflections on her identity, symmetrical to the last ones on a house of her own, present the first steps of the girl's movement towards the revision of her cultural heritage. She does not surrender to mutually exclusive cultural scripts, that is, to the alternative choice of escaping from a place she feels she does not belong to or the passive acceptance of the social and gender borders of her ethnic community. On the contrary, we note here the first workings of Esperanza's imagination in order to transcend them and to conquer a new space. In her *Bildung*, the people of the barrio play a central role. There are their painful stories of displacement, marginalization, and

confinement to provide her with “ferocious roots” (the ones of the four skinny trees in front of her house she identifies with), and to foster her imagination to fill in the blanks and to give them a different ending. The “other house,” in fact, the one she imagines in opposition to the house on Mango Street, first appears on Esperanza’s mind as a sheltering space for her friend Sally, to release her from the violence of her domestic place:

Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn’t have to go home? Do you wish your feet would one day keep walking and take you far away from Mango Street, far away, and maybe your feet would stop in front of a house, a nice one with flowers and big windows and steps for you to climb up two by two upstairs to where a room is waiting for you. And if you opened the little window latch and gave it a shove, the windows would swing open, all the sky would come in ... Only trees and more trees and plenty of blue sky. And you could laugh, Sally. (82-83)

Esperanza’s life in the barrio is surrounded by women who are confined to the household by social and gender borders that they are unable to cross, starting from her mother who was a “smart cookie” and “could have been somebody,” but quit school out of shame, because she didn’t have nice clothes; the recurring image of the woman at the window is significant in expressing their entrapment and immobility. These same women, on the other hand, encourage Esperanza’s freedom and creativity: Minerva reads her poems, her aunt listens to them and invites her to keep writing while her mother tells her to study hard; *las comadres*, the three mysterious women who appear at the funeral of a neighbor’s child, predict Esperanza’s eventual moving from Mango Street, but recommend her to remember to come back for the others: “A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are” (Cisneros 105). Actually, the ending of *The House on Mango Street* circles back to the beginning, thus representing Esperanza’s maturing as a girl and her birth as a writer. Her closing statement: “I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong” (109) is followed by the repetition of the opening lines of the book that she actually wrote. This circular structure allows to re-read Esperanza’s anxiety towards the “creation” of a house of her own as the opening of a symbolic space for all Chicanas to live in. Under this point of view, Esperanza’s quest echoes Gloria Anzaldua’s reclamation of the freedom “to carve and chisel” her own face, “to make a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with [her] own lumber, [her] own bricks and mortar and [her] own feminist architecture” (44). Both projects aren’t individualistic because the “I” who speaks places herself at the crossroads of different cultures and from that vantage point she is able to uproot dualistic thinking, decolonizing the place she lives or lived in, and speaking for “the ones who cannot out” (Cisneros 110).

Differently from the women in the barrio, the daughters of the Leong’s family in *Bone* are not hindered in their movements in and out of Chinatown, but that does not render the negotiation of distinct cultural and social spaces less problematic. On the contrary, the novel stages the difficulties and the emotional costs of this negotiation that are incremented by a generational gap. An internal barrier, in fact, seems to separate the world of the parents from that of the children. Mah’s and Leon’s history, part of the history of Chinese immigration to the USA, so deeply inscribed in the spaces of Chinatown, weighs heavily on the Leong’s daughters, producing a number of different coping strategies: Nina escapes from it, Ona succumbs to it, and Leila’s patiently works to come to terms with it. Their stories, in fact, are part of the “complex set of

identifications and disidentifications with the spatial, symbolic, historical, and aesthetic terms of both dominant American culture and the cultural nationalism and essentialism of first-generation Chinese American literature” that the novel presents (Izzo 153).

Leila’s work of memory, set in motion by her sister’s loss, is aimed at filling in the ruptures, voids and silences of the family’s life, but results also in an act of self-location—physical, cultural, and emotional. In fact, despite her job as community relations specialist for a school in Chinatown, that consists in “being the bridge” (Ng 14) between the classroom teacher and Chinese immigrant parents, Leila lives her different cultural affiliations as separate entities in her heart and mind and admits that she has a whole different vocabulary of feeling in English than in Chinese, and that “not everything can be translated” (Ng 16). She sometimes surrenders to the difficulty of transcoding a culture into another and against the cultural resistances of recent immigrants she answers with her “[t]his Isn’t China defense. I remind them ‘We’re in America.’ But some parents take this to heart and raise their voice” (Ng 14). The weaving work of memory and narration allows Leila to position herself inside a narrative of the past as a prerequisite for the development of a vision of the future; as Michael Fisher argues: “the search or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is a (re)-invention and discovery of a vision, both ethical and future-oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future” (196). Significantly the novel, in its reverse chronology, ends with Leila’s leaving Mah’s house, Salmon Alley, and Chinatown:

All my things fit into the back of Mason’s cousin’s Volvo. The last thing I saw as Mason backed out of the alley was the old blue sign, #2-4-6 UPDAIRE. No one has ever corrected it; someone repaints it every year. Like the oldtimer’s photos, Leon’s papers, and Grandpa Leong’s lost bones, it reminded me to look back, to remember. I was reassured. I knew what I held in my heart would guide me. So I wasn’t worried when I turned that corner, leaving the old blue sign, Salmon Alley, Mah and Leon—everything—backdaire. (190-191)

The endings of both *The House on Mango Street* and *Bone*, in content and in their circular structure, point out the role of memory and narration in the protagonists’ search for self-location, while leaving them on the verge of a new space. This circularity deconstructs the dichotomy between inside and outside, and, creating a symbolic bridge that can be crossed both ways, underlines the idea of identity as performative, in transition, a result of daily negotiations. The choice of both novelists of not describing the “other place,” the one outside the ethnic enclave, further emphasizes the role of memory and imagination for the construction of an ethnic identity and the re-vision of current power relations. Through the circularity of the narrative, moreover, Cisneros and Ng make the narrators’ leaving their place of origin coincide with their return, if only in memory and narration; the latter prompts a transformation of the perception and representation of the space of the ethnic enclave and provides the reader with an “inside story” which has a de-colonial effect against the dominant cultural imagination.

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NICOLETTA VALLORANI

DEMOCRACY ON THE ROCKS: OUTLAWING LAW IN TOURISTIC DYSTOPIAS, FROM  
VONNEGUT'S CARIBBEAN ISLANDS TO SELF'S HOLIDAY RESORTS

My work relates to dystopian imagination connected to the imagery of Caribbean islands and holiday resorts, as paradigms of wild yet user-friendly surroundings, where the Western traveller expects to be safe and sheltered, though deprived of the comforts of modernity. At first sight, the social and political organisation of this sort of dystopia appears to be of childish simplicity, based on rules that Western travellers—with their colonial attitude—feel sure they can understand or at least easily keep under control. In their narcissistic dream of utopia, travellers are unable to perceive the heterogeneous pressures traversing the expected utopian place—the Caribbean island—actually reacting against the oppressive clarity of the white-designed Utopian future, that is forever negated and deviated by the gradual surfacing of a deeply-rooted and self-generated notion of the State (Chambers 53). Within this horizon, Tzvetan Todorov's "tragic duality"—the endless swing between the ethics of mankind and the narrow nationalism of citizenship—produces a gap soon filled in by a third hybrid and creolized element, which is unstable and problematic but by no means easily dismissible.

To provide some evidence of what I mean, I have selected two texts, *Cat's Cradle* and *The Butt*, which, though apparently different, are both closely related to the issue of democracy in the way it is interpreted and implemented by the Other, a way that the Western gaze sometimes fails to understand.

Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963) is a "tight focused satire of *Player Piano* reconciled with the epic humor and odyssey of *The Sirens of Titan*" (Tomedi 39). Chronologically, this novel comes first and it somehow establishes the basic ground for a discourse on democracy and the Other. It unfolds following the voice of the I-narrator—meaningfully called John or Jonah (Tomedi 38-53)—who, while trying to interview the "chief creators" of the atomic bomb, lands on the Caribbean island of San Lorenzo. John or Jonah will accidentally become the president of San Lorenzo and become familiar with a quizzical system of laws shortly before the whole earth is turned into an ice crystal (Pagetti 269-277; Klinkowitz 52-62; Farrell 86-89).

The second text is much more recent, but surprisingly similar in terms of the political vision upon which representation is grounded. *The Butt* (2008) describes "a colonial-guilt dystopia, shades of the Archbishop of Canterbury's sharia ventilations gone troppo," that apparently "hovers over a Waugh narrative oddly invaded by Greene colonials, including an Honorary Consul" (Bywater). Tom Brodzinski is holidaying with his family in a distant, unnamed country that appears to be articulated as a traditional heavenly utopia. After smoking his last cigarette, he flips the butt off the balcony of the holiday apartment he is renting with his family, hitting the head of the elderly Reggie Lincoln, a fellow countryman who has married a native woman. The

latter comes from one of the most rigorous, mystical tribes of the desert interior; their customary law has been incorporated into the civil statute and has become part of the island's legal system. Tom undergoes a trial. He is condemned, must leave his family behind, and go through the arid heart of this strange island continent to unveil an unusual if meaningful relationship between colonized and colonizers.

Though radically different, the two stories focus on the same theme: living—though transitorily—in another place means inhabiting an ambiguous territory where the traveller has to face a new and diverse “worlding the world”—to quote Martin Heidegger as evoked by Gayatri Spivak. The fictional investigation of this peculiar in-betweenness has become increasingly frequent in contemporary times, and my point is that precisely this new status of the Western subject in the contemporary political world opens a sort of third phase in postcolonial development.

I would suggest that Phase 1 can be identified with the moment when an imperial power colonizes the Other, actually building in time “the repertoire of ‘epistemic violence’” (Spivak) that formed the emerging constellation of modernity in which the West, like every conqueror and empire, objectified the rest of the world and constituted itself as the subject of History” (Chambers 47). Phase 2 is marked by the Other reacting—striking and writing back—in order to recover his/her own identity and reestablish his/her state. Phase 3, begins when the colonizers face the Others on their own ground, and find themselves unable to cope with their laws and rules. In this phase, or at least at the beginning of it, we can still hear hegemonic voices portraying a colonial (or postcolonial) country, but it is quite clear that the ex-colonizers can no longer grasp and actually dominate the Other. Even while they go back to the imperial, hegemonic tradition, they are nonetheless obliged to acknowledge the natives' mystery, and end up portraying their culture as subaltern or simply as *other*. When closing the circle of their reasoning on the subaltern, the colonisers, seen through the native's gaze, become self-conscious—i.e. ONLY WHEN they are reflected in the native-objects. Later on, the conclusion of the reflecting and self-reflecting processes will produce the colonisers as subjects and the natives as their images (Chambers 58-59).

So, in blunt terms, just like Said's Orient, the Other outlined by Vonnegut and Self was also once “silent, available to Europe for the realization of projects that involved but were never directly responsible to the native inhabitants, and unable to resist the projects, images, or mere descriptions devised for it” (Said 94). Lately, this Other has become able to recombine patterns of power/powerlessness in order to switch the Western traveler from a dominant position to the role of a victim, unable to understand the native's “worlding of the world,” and his/her laws. The natives strike back, and they do so in unpredictable ways.

Quite meaningfully, both authors choose particular sorts of tourist resorts as their setting, apparently exploiting the notion of freedom and anarchy normally related to the idea of being on holiday. In both cases, the supposed heavenly utopia is soon reversed into a Hell of contradictory laws and rules, when the Western visitors fail to adapt to the new world they happen to be stuck in. Finally, both places may be referred to in terms of Avtar Brah's definition of *diaspora* as a *relational concept* referring to “configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another” (Brah 183). Of course, the native place is not presented as such, and does not apparently include the risk of the natives striking back or at least taking action against the Western visitors: quite the opposite. In *Cat's Cradle*, the “fictional island of San Lorenzo, a poor, desolate, anti-paradise” (Tomedi 42) where

John/Jonah is doomed to land and explore the political danger of science (Broer 63) attracts the tourist's attention through the usual advertising lies:

The news was in a special supplement to the *New York Sunday Times*. The supplement was a paid ad for a banana republic ... "the Republic of San Lorenzo" said the copy on the cover, "on the move! A healthy, happy, progressive, freedom-loving, beautiful nation makes itself extremely attractive to American investors and tourist alike." (Vonnegut 53-54)

The same goes for Self's exotic island:

He thought of the ads he'd seen at home: big billboards that had encouraged him to fly his family halfway around the world to this island continent. On these, smiling Anglo servitors, clad in spotless white, were laying out tableware on immaculate linen, while behind them a towering rock formation burned orange in the low-angled sun. "We've set the table and checked under it for flippers," the slogan read. "So where the hell are you?" (Self 35)

Quite obviously, this description and anticipation of the tourist resort leads us to a new concept of diaspora space, which "includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put.' The diaspora space is the site where *the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is a native*" (Brah 209). Both novels include three kinds of identities: the natives, the Westerners, and the Westerners playing at being natives. The latter are the bearers of the point of view from which the story is narrated.

After getting to the Caribbean island more or less by accident—John/Jonah is offered a job as the president of the Republic of San Lorenzo. Despite the fact that he is drawn into the events of the plot and must face potentially dramatic or disquieting situations, Jonah will mostly prove to be astonishingly apathetic and deeply inadequate for the role he's been appointed to (Broer 59-61). In the same way, "the whole bizarre palimpsest of race and culture in this vast land bamboozled Tom" (Self 84), a tourist in a land whose legal working totally eludes him. His inability to understand the rigorous prohibition of smoking causes him endless troubles, eventually resulting in a permanent exile from his homeland: "For the three weeks of the Brodzinskis' vacation, Tom had found the prohibition on smoking, in this vast and sunbaked country, particularly intrusive" (Self 1). When facing the punishment implied in breaking the law, Tom is at a loss:

I-I didn't realize any of this stuff, you know. About, um, customary law. I thought it was, like, a developed country—it certainly sells itself that way so that it can rake in the tourist bucks. (Self 22)

The inability of the Westerners to understand the Other is rooted—or presented as rooted—in the complex history of the two colonies. Vonnegut tells the story of S. Lorenzo in chapters 48 and 49, as if it were drawn from a book, not by chance written by a white man called Julian Castle, "a vividly drawn minor character who underscores two of the novel's major themes: personal responsibility and the search for meaning in life" (Marvin 87). Castle's book openly belongs to that legacy of the texts that, according to Said, "can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time, such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence and weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it" (Said 94). Through Castle book, Jonah finds out that Bokonon, born in 1891, "was a Negro, born an

Episcopalian and a British subject, on the island of Tobago. He was christened Lionel Boyd Johnson” (Vonnegut 68). After attending the London school of economics and political science and fighting in World War I, he sets sail for home (Tobago), but he is stopped by a submarine taken prisoner, then captured by the British destroyer, *The Raven*, that came to rest in the Cape Verde islands. He leaves again with a rich boy—Rumford—and his schooner; they shipwreck in Bombay, and Johnson stays in India for two years, becoming a follower of Mohandas K. Gandhi. He is then arrested for leading groups that protested against the British rule by lying down on railroad tracks, and shipped back to Tobago, where he builds another schooner, called the *Lady’s Slipper II* and sails about the Caribbean. Summing up, and quite paradoxically, San Lorenzo was then founded by a Negro, Lionel Boyd Johnson, later called Bokonon, born in Tobago, educated in England, jailed in India, hired by an American and then shipwrecked, with the American on the Caribbean Island. And the whole story is narrated in a book, written—as I said—by Julian Castle, a colonizer.

In the same way, the birth of the colony, in Self’s novel, is told to Tom by the anthropologist and surgeon Erich Von Sasser as a tale of economic exploitation that is fully coherent with the author’s poetics (Hunter Hayes 3-52) and is put forward as an actual example of Spivak’s “epistemic power”:

The mining company had shot all the game—there was nothing for the people to eat. An entire generation—maybe two—had already been decimated. The guvvie encouraged this genocide, cynically offering so-called “development grants” for every native inducted into the certain death of the mine. There were no human-rights monitors in those days, Mr. B. None of the voyeuristic gear of an international community, which in our era sees fit to come and see such atrocity exhibitions. (Self 302)

Von Sasser seems to reflect on the White Man’s burden, while linking the colonial enterprise to the European imperial legacy:

No, this was the heart of darkness, all right. And my father found out that the indigenous people, most of all, had forgotten its anatomy. The tribal groups—if they’d ever existed, to begin with—had been broken up. Isolated mobs of old men and women, and young children, roamed the bled searching for water, feeding on each other’s corpses when they fell. (Self 302)

Openly enough, in both dystopias, the story of the natives is totally rewritten by the first colonizers of the land, non-natives themselves, but pretending to be so. Their “Invention” of the native culture is authorized by the supposed inability of the real natives to produce anything meaningful. In Von Sasser’s words:

These people had bugger-all. Nothing. No language but a debased Anglo-pidgin, no identity except as a concentration camp inmates or escapes. They had no songs, no dances, no myths, no cosmology—not even the most rudimentary creation myths, such as are found among remote islanders. There were no rituals of holy men and women, no leaders—or taboos. These benighted people had only *engwegge*—and death. (Self 306)

In this cultural wasteland, Von Sasser seems to provide the fictional illustration of what Said acknowledges as the main feature of Western Imperialism: “Behind the White Man’s mask of amiable leadership, there is always the express willingness to use force, to kill and be killed. What dignifies his mission is some sense of intellectual dedication; he is a white man, but not for mere profit, since his chosen star presumably

sits far above the earthly gain” (Said 226). This mission, as Vonnegut shows, is not necessarily successful:

Johnson and Mc Cabe had failed to raise the people from misery and muck. ... Everybody was bound to fail for San Lorenzo was as unproductive as an equal area in Sahara or the Polar Ice Cap. At the same time, it had as dense a population as could be found anywhere, India & China not excluded. There were four hundred and fifty inhabitants for each uninhabitable square mile (Vonnegut 86).

In a grotesquely overcrowded space, and in the face of such failure of the colonial enterprise, the White Man keeps his power, grounded in his being—in Said’s words—both “an idea and a reality” (Said 226). However unsuccessful the civilizing enterprise may be, the ontological profile of the White Man stays untouched, and it involves a definite attitude towards both the white and the non-white worlds. This attitude collates a whole set of linguistic and cultural habits, social and political regulations, feelings and beliefs that globally define a global power in front of which non whites, and even whites themselves, are expected to bend:

I don’t mean it literally, but the trouble with Anglo civilization is that it’s a left-brain business, all to do with order, systematization, push-button-bloody-A. Papa understood this, as well as knowing enough anatomy—and anthropology—to see the solution ... The corpus callosum—that’s the bloody enemy, Tom, it’s a tough little bugger. ... Information-bloody-superhighway of the human brain, that’s what it is, yeah. Same as the internet, the corpus callosum fuses together two hemispheres, the right and the left. Movement, speech, sensation, visual recognition – they dominate, yeah, they’re the Anglos of the brain. (Self 338)

The colonial metaphor applied here to the structure of the brain seems to hide the gesture of the conqueror focusing on a specific purpose—rationalizing the functioning of both the brain and the colony—regardless of whether the rationalizing operation is harmonious or disharmonious with the site it is applied to. So the native—or the Westerner playing as native—strikes back, “othering” the Western traveler, who is obliged to follow a law whose ratio is totally obscure to him. To a certain extent this othering is to be intended as the fictional, Caribbean backlash of that “epistemic violence” that formed the emerging constellation of modernity in which the West, like every conqueror and empire, objectified the rest of the world and constituted itself as the subject of History (Chambers 47).

*The Butt*, in particular, perfectly outlines the profile of a western traveler—a tourist—“who comes here in ignorance of both our civil and our customary laws” because he is an alien species, and “all alien species are destructive” (Self 128). Ignorance makes it possible, in a different fictional horizon, for the protagonist of *Cat’s Cradle* to comply with Frank Hoenikker’s wish to appoint him as president of San Lorenzo. This is to be done, of course, without any elections, because “there never has been. We’ll just announce who the new President is” (Marvin 86). He further marries Mona Aamons Monzano, “more a symbol than a character” (Marvin 86), because “it’s predicted in the book of Bokonon that she’ll marry the next president of San Lorenzo” (Vonnegut 128).

In the light of such dystopias, we may agree with Chambers when he states that:

In the ruins of previous anthropology, sociology, history and philosophy, in the interstices of these torn and wounded epistemes where the rules of disciplinary genres are blurred and betrayed, the object disappears to be replaced by intimations of a potential space in which all subjects emerge modified from encounters that are irreducible to a unique point of view. An authority slips from my hand into the hands

of others, they, too, become the authors, the subjects, not simply the effects or objects of my ethnography. (Chambers 51)

The fate of the White Man, in Vonnegut's and Self's version of colonialism, is marked by a meaningless and irrefutable subjugation. Bokonon, in full coherence with Vonnegut's appraisal of the universe as absurd (Davis 10), drives the survivors on San Lorenzo to commit suicide, on the grounds that "God was surely trying to kill them, possibly because he was through with them, and [that] they should have the good manners to die" (Vonnegut 170). Tom finally undergoes Von Sasser's surgical therapy and ends his life in a hypnotic trance, where he is adrift and "faintly amused by the way things had turned out. After all he was only doing what he had always done: passively conforming to an invented belief system" (Self 351). And Vonnegut, through the words of Bokonon, concludes his personal version of utopia by saying "The hand that stocks the drugstores rules the world" (Vonnegut 177).

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GIORGIO RIMONDI

“TEMPO DELLA MUSICA E TEMPO DELL’IMMAGINE”:  
A CONTRIBUTION TO JAZZ PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIES

**I** – Is it really true that photography captures reality and gives back a faithful image of it? **For** sure, the world manifests itself through images, and yet to our eyes they don’t reveal themselves as so meek and still, as blurred and moving. Which is also true for the photographer’s eyes. His/her job consists of reducing the infinite “plot of what’s possible” into trimming *that* “possible” onto film. The rest, that is reality and its thousand other possibilities, stays out. Because fixing time on an image means reducing something to the inexorable flux of the real, in order to concentrate on one of its specific traits, which thus assumes the evidence of a trace, something that pertains to us while we are thrown into the world’s spectacle. That’s why we can’t think of photography as the double of a universe it reverberates, mirror-like, or refers to. Instead, we must think of it as a performative clue, or else an uncanny symptom of the multiple levels at which reality manifests itself.

Through such an articulation we meet jazz photography, a paradoxical creature that encapsulates the ephemeral of the sonic vibration into the factuality of the mechanical medium. It further documents an art form that connects to the acceptance of the unforeseen, to the valorization of the event, to the practice of improvisation. In fact, it is in the very space of this *aporia* that jazz photography plays its most interesting game. In that it challenges a music that subverts the notion of linear time/temporality while asserting the need for a discontinuity made of returns, retentions, and anticipations. Indeed, jazz timing, through the praxis of improvisation, aims at the convergence of *techne* and *tyche*, of “knowing how” and seizing the time. One could easily ask: is this really the nature of photography? In fact, also the photo “snapshot,” in order to be such, must know how to seize the time, reacting to a kind of “date” with time, shaped as an inescapable *rendez-vous*. In other words, for photographic practice, like for jazz practice, it is not so much that the relation with *kronos* is questioned, as the one with *kairos*, the propitious instant.

**II** – Not coincidentally, then, the origins of jazz are blurred with the apparition of a mythic image, that of the band of Charles “Buddy” Bolden, the great New Orleans trumpet player. Of him—who never cut a record nor recorded a single note—only one anonymous and faded picture is left, taken around 1905, which shows him along with his musicians (**fig. 1**): up front, Jefferson Mumford on guitar and Frank Lewis on clarinet; behind them, left to right, Jimmy Johnson on double bass, Bolden on trumpet, Willie Cornish on trombone, William Warner on clarinet.

I found this picture in an essay by Donald M. Marquis, published in 1978 by the title *In Search of Buddy Bolden. First Man of Jazz*. No “clues” enter the frame detailing either time or location of the shot: the camera zooms in on the musicians leaving

nothing else to be seen. For this reason, too, the photo seems to be easily “readable.” And yet it is not so. Beside Marquis’ essay, various studies have been recently devoted to that portrait, the latest of which, entitled *The Mystery of the Buddy Bolden Photograph*, is authored by Gerhard Kubik.

He can be primarily credited with publishing all the known versions of the photo, among which the very first one, that appeared in 1939 in the volume *Jazzmen* (**fig. 2**), with the bass player on the left. When compared with Marquis’ photograph, the frame is wider and one can make out the backdrop better, particularly on top. Then a second one, published in 1967 in the volume *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* (**fig. 3**), features the bass player on the right, a version that looks like it is turned sideways.

All the prints are trimmed on the sides, if in different ways. In Marquis’ photo there are no margins around the musicians; in the 1939 photo there is more space on top; in the one from 1967 there is more space at the bottom, and a semi-circular shape looms, hardly readable.

Yet, two more prints are extant, preserved at the Bill Russel fund at the Historical New Orleans Collection (**fig. 4**). When compared with the others, they look mirror-like and “widened” further. We can thus see that the light backdrop behind the musicians is a curtain, likely erected by the photographer in order to emphasize the portrayed figures. Also, along with the light shape at the bottom, on top we notice yet another shape, semi-circular and dark, itself quite hard to interpret.

In all these cases, we are not dealing with different photos, but with the very same one, if “framed” differently and printed once correctly, once sideways. No negative of this historic portrait exists, no “matrix” that can guarantee a correct interpretation. It is lost. But at this level something strange happens. The image of the Bolden Band comes to life: it multiplies, whirls, expands and shrinks, thus altering its very nature as a document. A document that looks willing to talk to us. But to say what?

III – In fact, it is Gerhard Kubik who says something. If we credit him primarily for publishing the photo’s various prints, we secondarily credit him for reviewing the whole issue by sorting out all the questions raised by the photograph. For example: why don’t we find a drummer nor a violin player, replaced as they are by, well, *two* clarinet players? And why is the bandleader not “leading” his band in the foreground? But most disturbing is yet another mystery.

In order to understand it, let us go back to the Bill Russel fund photos (**fig. 5**). In the “sideways” version (lower) both the guitarist and the bass player look left-handed—suffice it to notice how they hold their instruments. And then there is something wrong with Bolden, too: he holds his trumpet with his right hand while he should be doing it with his left one, as a trumpet player needs his right hand for the fingering. Three left-handed musicians out of six in a band is some too many, thus the other photo must be the “right” one.

And yet, there is something unconvincing in the other photo, too (top). In fact, the posture of the two clarinetists looks wrong: the system of the instruments’ keys would require them to hold them with their right hands close to the bell and their left hands close to the mouthpiece/embouchure. The very fact that the contrary happens (see William Warner) leaves us to think that this image, too, is not correct. Then the only sure fact is that, however you turn it, the photo always shows something incomprehensible. Thus, let us go back to Kubik. He ends his article by advancing a surprising hypothesis: the one image of Buddy Bolden’s band we have is the result of some editing.

The photographer must have taken two photos, not one, and edited them afterwards (**fig. 6**). Let us clarify this: first he must have photographed Johnson, Bolden and Mumford (the three guys we see here on the right), then Cornish, Warner and Lewis (those we see on the left). Then he must have developed the two negatives separately, printing the former straight, while cutting the latter lengthwise in order for it to match, then printing it sideways. Finally he managed one positive image out of two negative snippets: the one that’s considered “straight,” where the clarinetists’ posture is wrong. This considered, the anonymous photographer’s operation looks rather weird, if substantially plausible, for a series of reasons that Kubik reviews in detail.

We can leave them now, though, because we have yet another problem.

**IV** - If analyses like this one help us understand the past and keep the threads of memory alive, they undoubtedly can’t solve all problems. After so much work, the scenario that surfaces looks less like a geometric theorem, than a crime scene, rife with clues and hints that do not allow for the identification of a culprit. In fact, if particularly lucid, Kubik’s work does not provide the ultimate solution to the mystery of the photograph; it rather adds impulse to establishing a more and more fascinating jazz mythography, by turning a detective story from the early years of the twentieth century into a technological thriller of sorts. Something that has to do more with fiction than with facts.

Actually, if we consider the photograph in its singularity—as we have no other images of those musicians and of what they would represent—we must acknowledge that there is nothing more appropriate to produce the “auratic” effect Walter Benjamin writes about. That is because its matrix is not available and only one grainy specimen remains. It captures our gaze as the apparition of a remoteness likely resolved, separated as it is from our present and, above all, from the present of jazz, of the music today’s jazz musicians play. Having understood that, over time, it has come to us in various versions—turned sideways left or right, trimmed in its bottom or differently framed, even disassembled into two parts then reassembled—,only apparently simplifies its reception. Indeed, it multiplies the mystery it carries.

There is more. Somehow, every discourse about the jazz image ends up here, directing us through the territory traced by this “first” portrait that unceasingly reverts to an origin with mythic contours. And yet such an origin does not appear like a fact that’s inert and fully objectifiable, but like a cluster of potential meanings and times. Not only does that image produce an auratic effect, of distance and singularity, but it generates an effect of temporal proliferation, for it configures itself as the anticipation of a future whose secret it holds. Indeed, it has the power to found an artistic discipline, jazz photography—then non-existent and yet destined to an ever-increasing success—which goes hand in hand with jazz history while contributing to disseminate its knowledge.

Starting precisely with the Buddy Bolden band portrait, it would be incorrect to consider jazz photography as the pure witnessing of a sound event. This because, as we have said, jazz art and photo art are challenged by the same performing extemporariness, namely time and the very possibility of manipulating it. If the working of (and with) time is the foundation of each musical project, then it is also active in the Bolden Band portrait. When we also think that originally, as limited as technology was, the photo was certainly distinct and differently readable. While, on the other hand, only today can it converse with memory and **activate that memory oxymoron that produces an object when it is turned into a “find.”**

If, then, the photograph of the Buddy Bolden band still interrogates us, it is not because we are really convinced that sooner or later it will yield its mystery—which keeps attracting us—as much as we, by interrogating it over and over, can better understand who we are; or, possibly, which mystery we are for ourselves—in front of it.

V – To conclude, by starting from such considerations, I would like to propose a little exercise, a tutorial of sorts, examining three jazz images.

First photo (**fig. 7**): Charles Peterson, *Gene Krupa, Eddie Condon, Lou McGarity and Bill Davison*, 1945.

Semioticians agree that there are patent analogies between a jazz concert and a good conversation. In order to succeed, both need some essential elements, among which are shared codes and reciprocal listening within a specific temporal dimension. Such elements should work together, because there is no shared practice without shared codes, nor communication that ignores the interlocutor and the timing of her/his response. Well, Peterson's image seems to confirm this semiotic theory. Postures, countenances, the musicians' very dispositions, all subscribe to a nice gathering of old friends who talk about this and that, sipping a good glass of wine. And yet, at least for me, such countenances and postures relate to an even more intense convivial situation, that of a card game in some *osteria*, where time goes by between the putting down of a winning ace, the counting of points, and the adding of some colorful profanity. Thus the "jazz field" can be also defined as the space/time of a freedom within which everyone literally "plays" his/her role while respecting everyone else's (role-)playing.

Second photo (**fig. 8**): Herman Leonard, *Dexter Gordon*, 1948.

We may doubt that photography is an art, and yet it undoubtedly dictates an aesthetic distance. That is why this Herman Leonard image is totally paradigmatic. Setting, framing, lighting: everything concurs to the construction of the jazz aesthetics, or bop aesthetics to be more accurate. Above all, it is smoke that contributes to it, as it is the real subject of the photo. Smoke establishes jazz's male chauvinistic ("*machista*") image, while enhancing a performance's impermanence. Curiously enough, the very unnatural fixedness of the twists of smoke enhances the temporal dimension of the music. For sure, the saxophone is the symbol of a jazzman's sexual power, as the score is of his music skill and the clothing of his hip elegance. For sure, the photo, taken during a break, hints at "a warrior's rest." And yet the smoke—which, by its vividness, evokes a complex and codified symbolism—is the very instance of change, the unpredictable element the improviser is challenged by. And, in the photo-staging process it is the one element you cannot pose. On the contrary, in its expanding twists and twirls, smoke itself becomes a producer of images. Thus smoke is not only the plastic reflex of sound, but also—at least in the bop aesthetics—the style signature of jazz imagination.

Third photo (**fig. 9**): Pannonica de Koenigswarter, *Thelonious Monk*, 1950s.

In *Light in August*, William Faulkner writes that Blacks can inhabit duration like cats do, who have won eternity by dint of immobility and torpor. I don't know whether Thelonious Monk read Faulkner, and neither do I think that, on reading, he would approve of him. And yet some of Monk's portraits, like this one by the "Baroness of Jazz," look like they are deliberately arranged to admit that the novelist was right. For him, we know, time was not only the fabric human experience is woven into, but the secret of his inspiration. Because Monk would sculpt, not endure, time with his music. And time hitches along with time: that special ability of his to suspend rhythmic and harmonic solutions, suddenly doubling or slowing tempo, rescuing it from the brink and

abusing it, always giving it re-birth and the chance to start anew. Of course done in his own way, and with supreme contempt for rules. With that style that befuddled hair-splitters. Although, in order to create such music, Monk needed to brood and sleep, intensely, readily and deeply. He would “take time” in his own way, of course. Sleeping.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

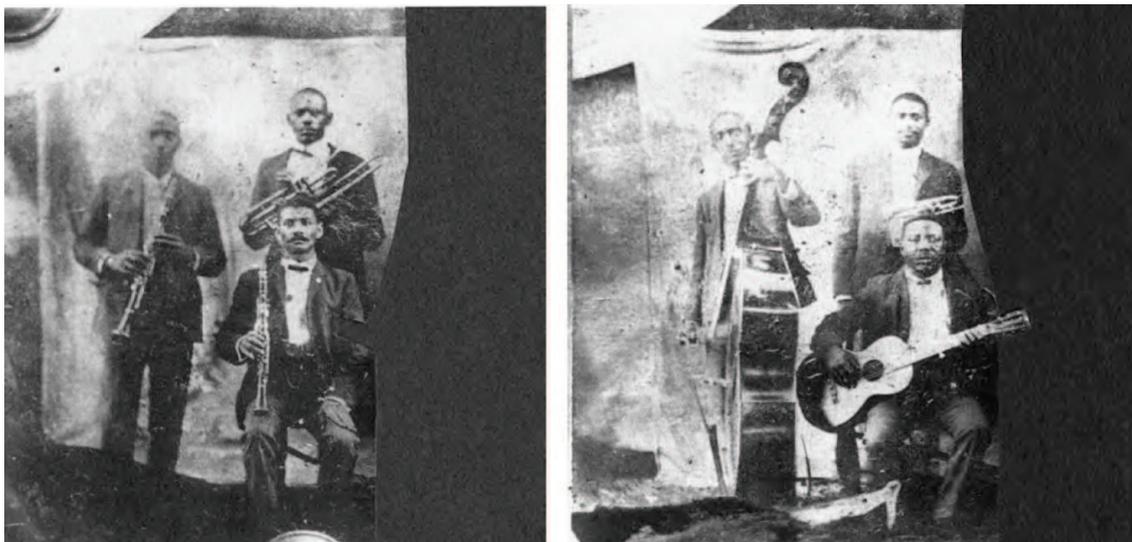


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

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SOSTENE MASSIMO ZANGARI

THE ROTTING POT: THE AESTHETIC OF JUNK  
IN GARIBALDI LAPOLLA'S *THE GRAND GENNARO*

The inscription carved at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, which reproduces lines from Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" (1883), is one of the most magniloquent expressions of America's openness to the plight of oppressed people. The willingness to accept "the huddled masses yearning to be free" coming from Europe is connected to the idea of immigrants as "wretched refuse" that, once in the United States, would be recycled into Americans. This transformative power was part of an imagery that, at least since Crèvecoeur's *Letters From An American Farmer* (1782), had been a constitutive part of America's image of itself. Some years after the "New Colossus" was published, Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* (1908) would lend a definitive label to this transformative imagery (Sollors 66-94).

However, living conditions in immigrant neighborhoods in the US at the time, documented in articles and reportages by journalists and social workers, questioned the effectiveness of America's regenerative power. Judging from descriptions of squalid and crumbling tenements, with no heating and sewage system, as well as streets lined with garbage and vacant lots dotted with discarded objects—recorded, for instance, in Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) or Lilian Wald's *The House on Henry Street* (1911)—it seemed that newcomers from Europe, the "wretched refuse," had been simply removed to a bigger landfill. No wonder, then, that together with an aesthetic of the picturesque—which portrayed the immigrant as ethnographic curiosity—American writers developed a tendency to equate newcomers to junk: both strategies ensured that the cultural and social difference of immigrant otherness was objectified into unthreatening images (Gandal).

Little heed these accounts gave to the horror experienced by immigrants themselves when they found that the country they had imagined as having streets paved of gold was in fact dirtier and more squalid than their home villages. In *The Promised Land* (1912), Mary Antin describes the "air ... heavy with evil odours of degradation" in Boston's Dover Street, "a rubbish heap of damaged humanity, and it will take a powerful broom and an ocean of soapsuds to clean it out" (Antin 287). The narrative identifies the slum as the arena for a rite of passage: little Mary, confident in the transformative powers of America, although "shackled with a hundred chains of disadvantage," had the strength to "plant[ed] little seeds, right there in the mud of shame, that blossomed into the honeyed rose of widest freedom" (286) and, by the end of the narrative she had accomplished her transformation into American citizen. In the 1910s, similar optimistic

sublimations of waste into American citizenship were shared by other ethnic autobiographers and novelists.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1930s, when legislation restricting new arrivals had been finally approved and a new wave of ethnic writers had grown up nurturing a more critical stance towards America, similar optimistic ventures had fallen out of fashion. Depression-era ethnic writers offered fictional accounts where junk and waste were contiguous to the emotional and social landscape of a population shut off from the benefits of American citizenship—no air of hope breathed through Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), Pietro Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* (1939) or Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1941).

Although *The Grand Gennaro*, the 1935 novel by Garibaldi Lapolla, might chronologically be included in the above list, in many ways it is a relic of a forgotten and distant era. In fact, it charts the rags-to-riches journey of a Calabrese peasant in New York that resembles immigrant stories of success published twenty years earlier. Moreover, the three parts of the book are meant to organize the events as a Dantesque tale of redemption: the protagonist Gennaro Acucci first pursues business success with ruthless cynicism, then undergoes a process of redemption, and finally becomes a generous community leader. However, there is another reason why *The Grand Gennaro* differs from the work of contemporary ethnic writers: the book gives junk more than a decorative role, not just a component for sketching squalid urban vignettes, but the factor that allows the protagonist to earn money and become wealthy.

At the time, first-generation Italian and Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants were the largest groups working in junk collection. New York City street-cleaning commissioner Col. George E. Warring Jr. reasoned that Italians were “a race with a genius for rag-and-bone picking and for subsisting on rejected trifles of food” (Zimring 51). It was not unusual for immigrants to thrive in the business and become rich entrepreneurs such as Sigmund Dringer and Julius Solomon (see Zimgrin, 2009). The historical proximity between immigrants and garbage leads to a basic question about *The Grand Gennaro*: is Lapolla's focus on junk simply a matter of realism, or can it suggest further, less evident meanings? Moreover, what do we have to make of the fact that the rags-to-riches tale, for once, is rewritten as “through-rags-to-riches”—that is, that Gennaro transforms, as he says, “rags into dollar bills”?

### *The Dantesque Journey of an Italian Immigrant*

Garibaldi Lapolla was born in 1888 in a small town in Basilicata, and emigrated with his family to the US just two years later. A brilliant student, he majored in literature at Columbia University and afterwards opted for a lifelong career as a teacher of English. His interest in pedagogy found an outlet in a number of articles and books where Lapolla outlined new methodological principles for language teaching. He also authored an Italian cookbook and three novels that, in spite of good reviews, failed to attract the attention of the great public and went soon out of print. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century interest in ethnic authors and the consolidation of Italian-American studies as a legitimate field in Academia led to reissue his last literary effort, the 1935 novel *The Grand Gennaro* (Belluscio xv-xxxvi).

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<sup>1</sup> Two notable examples are Constantine Panunzio's *The Soul of An Immigrant* (1921) and Elias Tobenkin's *Witte Arrives* (1916).

The book tracks the Dantesque progress from vice to redemption of protagonist Gennaro Acucci, an impoverished immigrant from Southern Italy, who abandons wife and three children to land in New York with the idea of “making America,”—that is making money and shaping his own destiny—a plan to escape the marginal role imposed on him by the feudal social order of the Italian Mezzogiorno. Starting from the lowest of occupations, that of rag picker, Gennaro becomes wealthy and successful by hard work, cunning, violence, bullying and brutal force. These qualities do not traditionally belong to the hero of rags-to-riches stories, as pictured, for example, in Horatio Alger's books, but had already been referred to by some novelists who had focused on how fortunes were made in America—i.e. Abraham Cahan in *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917). A determination to succeed shapes Gennaro's self-construction as American individual, and throughout the first part of the book, the growth of his rag-picking business is matched by displays of a newly-acquired power over people: the protagonist takes delight in prevailing over individuals, winning over women and by having fellow Italian immigrants depend on him—the hero is particularly pleased when the men in question belong to a superior class in the mother country.<sup>2</sup>

Lapolla, however, avoids exploring the traditional question of immigrant adapting to America. Issues of adaptation such as the acquisition of a new language, a staple of immigrant autobiography and fiction, are not touched upon. In fact, Gennaro's unwillingness to part with the earrings given to him by his father—singled out by other characters in a number of occasions as a sign of Gennaro's coarseness—manifest his intention to be accepted by America at his own terms. At the start of the book, fellow countryman Rocco Pagliamini warns Gennaro that, to make America, “You got to sweat, my son; you got to starve; you got to turn your own relatives away starving” (Lapolla 12). In fact, as Rocco predicted, Gennaro seems to re-enact the myth of King Midas: although endowed with the magic gift of transforming rags into dollar bills, Gennaro has a negative effect on his family, who join him in New York after his business starts to thrive: none of its members seems able to enjoy the fruits of the prosperity for which Gennaro has fought. Both his wife Rosaria and his first son Domenico die, while his daughter becomes a nun—severing all links with her father—and his last son, Emilio, struggles to find an independent identity.

Salvation for the protagonist comes under the form of Carmela Dauri, a young Americanized immigrant whose religious matronly aura seems to have beneficial effects on the people that surround her. She also proves to be an excellent business woman: her attitude towards enterprise, however, differs from Gennaro's, in that it is grounded on the belief that business needs to have a “soul.” Gennaro and Carmela become partners, first in commerce and afterwards as husband and wife, a relationship that sets the protagonist on the road to redemption as he progressively loses his assertive attitude to become a generous community leader. The change is marked by his financing the construction of an Italian church for the immigrants and a benevolent stance towards his labourers: when they go on strike asking for better wages, Gennaro quickly accepts their demands and offers a feast to celebrate the deal.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Viscusi argues that the memory of exploitation in their native land is one of the founding myth of Italia-America (270). In *The Grand Gennaro*, this memory triggers a “revenge fantasy.”

*An Immigrant "Grey Area"*

Steven Belluscio argued that Lapolla's work didn't fit within the main paradigm of 1930s literature, combining experimentalism and a proletarian vision, which explains why *The Grand Gennaro* failed to gain an audience. However, the several flaws of the book must be pointed out: an inner weakness in organizing the material and a tendency to exploit melodrama, effects that seemed to be the legacy of a rich tradition of Italian American feuilleton and theatre.<sup>3</sup> Further, while the book doesn't succeed in making more of its religious and Dantesque paradigms, it also lacks a stronger sociological vision that could provide unity to the processes of immigrant dislocation described by the writer but not organized into a coherent framework, such as those devised by Wright under the influence of the Chicago school. However, the book, is not without points of interest, and in particular in the prominence it gives to junk and waste.

On a surface level, junk provides an objective correlative to the marginal condition of Italian immigrants. The novel opens with a reference to a Harlem that, in the early 1890s, was losing some of its lustre; the dwellings of a prosperous upper class lay abandoned: "Cherry wood interiors fell into disrepair, mahogany-banistered stairways creaked and lost newel or spindle, and the black-and-white mantelpieces gaped open where they had once been rigidly cemented" (Lapolla 8). Into these houses, the author adds, "rushed the peasants that had left their impoverished farms in Calabria or Sicily, in the Apuglie [sic], or in Basilicata." The degradation is also marked by living arrangements that clash with Victorian notions of domesticity: "Where one family had lived, now five or six struggled for a bit of space for a bed and a chance at the only sink or water-closet" (Lapolla 8).

Deterioration infects backyards "which once had been miniature gardens and had contained shade trees," and at present provided room for "the inevitable old-lumber shacks with their tar-paper roofs" (Lapolla 15). The same degraded spectacle is contemplated by the Parterre, the building where Gennaro lives:

empty lots stretched on each side pied with refuse of kitchens and factories. Tin cans and old lumber, slug from the wire-works further down, rusty iron, newspapers an rags caked with mud and dirt and worked into the ground, and in and around all three articles weeds shot up, occasionally a bush of wild aster, and along the edges even scraps of golden-rod. (Lapolla 92)

Gennaro's headquarters are a continuation of the external landscape: "The large dark room was a haphazard collection of old scraps of iron, pots, pans, stoves, pipe, piles of old rugs, brass fenders, copper boilers. It reeked with the odour of discarded things, and the air danced with motes of lint" (Lapolla 77). Only toward the end of the book, when Gennaro has finally undergone the better part of his redemptive journey, he will have clean and ordered rooms (Lapolla 318).

As previously mentioned, an imagery of waste and junk to express the marginal status of ethnics provided a common lingo in Depression-era fiction. What is distinctive about Lapolla is his attempt to make the identification more explicit. Waste mixes with the bodies of immigrants, as they literally feed on leftovers: in the streets there are "old women, selling stale rolls from the American bakeries" (Lapolla 59)—if impoverished

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<sup>3</sup> Melodrama was in fact one of the first medium adopted by immigrant literati from Italy (such as Bernardino Ciambelli) to shape the experience of their fellow countrymen in America. See Bernabei, 1999.

Italians survive on the food discarded by America, perhaps the recycling process envisioned by "The New Colossus," where the new Continent would feed immigrant to make them a better sort of individuals, is not taking place.

Apparently, quite the reverse is happening as Don Anselmo, the priest of the Italian community, argues in the second part of the book: "without the restraints of an orderly upper class with power and position, the tendency is for the men and women who achieve a place of wealth and command to follow the lowest, and not the highest, instincts" (Lapolla 128). This leads to a situation where:

the worst characters tend to be imitated ... The vicious assume control. It becomes smart and swaggering to be bad. That's what happened to our Italian peasants—a good lot, a thrifty hard-working group, but for so many years restrained by poverty, by lack of education, by customs that had the virtue of sanctity. But give them freedom, and see what happens. (Lapolla 128)

As some commentators have pointed out, this sort of sociological explanation was frankly too simple and betrays a sort of upper-class contempt of the better sort of people towards the success of Gennaro (see Meckel, 1987).

However, Don Anselmo's remarks point to a context wider than the Italian community. As Franco Moretti has detailed in a recent essay on Ibsen, "The Grey Area," the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the triumph of the industrial bourgeoisie as the ruling class, and the newly-achieved prominence found expression in a vision where its creative intervention on the natural environment (by way of its transformation or destruction) enhances economic development and creates new occasions for profit. Enveloped in prophetic metaphors of prosperity, these visions try to conceal what Moretti sees as an historic "unresolved dissonance" within bourgeois discourse, a dissonance connecting capital accumulation with the violation of basic ethic and human principles (exploitation of labour, for instance), or the recourse to unfair business practices: a "gray area" that, although allowed by permissive legislation, "stinks" of unlawfulness. The rags-to-riches narrative formula of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, then, might well be taken as the American literary attempt to resolve this dissonance, by clothing economic success with the language of the Puritan virtues of Alger's heroes, and portraying frugal entrepreneurs winning over unscrupulous capitalists (Trachtenberg 80). Various American ethnic writers had addressed the "unresolved dissonance" of bourgeois culture in their stories about successful immigrants, matching the improvement in social status with a sense of inner emptiness and loss, thus questioning the desirability of undergoing this American tale of progress (as expressed in the already mentioned *The Rise of David Levinsky*). *The Grand Gennaro* provides another instance of this trend and goes a step further. The low instincts that Don Anselmo blames for the corruption of Italian immigrants are dominant paradigms of behaviour in a society based on free enterprise that has turned into a Hobbesian universe. By saying he's ready to get mixed with dirt and waste if this is the price to pay to be successful in America, Gennaro subscribes to the ruthless ethos of Gilded Age capitalists, thus showing he has assimilated.

Gennaro realizes that "you can't make America just working. It's too long to wait" (Lapolla 14). His self-construction as successful American includes bullying his friend Rocco into accepting him as a partner first, and as boss afterwards. "Methods not quite so direct and ruthless as he had applied to Rocco, but violent and effective in subtler ways, put him finally at the head of a huge old-rag-and metal industry" (20)—Gennaro, too, treads the path of the "gray area," and applies brute force first to improve his

business and then in his relationship with people, by way of “strange impulses of self-assertion” (26), in particular over the women that he seduces. At the end of the book, Gennaro will be killed by his old friend Rocco, but the money he made and the position he achieved testify to the basic validity of the book’s initial premise, that is success and ruthlessness are closely connected, and this realization sheds a negative light on the inner workings of the American system.

*Conclusion: The Rotting Pot*

The shores that welcomed the “wretched refuse” from Europe are themselves a collection of junk, leftovers and discarded objects. The vision issuing from *The Grand Gennaro* proclaims that immigrants to the US were not nurtured by the lofty ideals of liberty and democracy enshrined in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights; in their place, it was s that waste massively produced by post-Civil War economic expansion that provided he basic nourishment. As a consequence, adapting to the new landscape means that newcomers themselves turn into garbage—the Melting Pot process is not seen as working a transformation producing human beings of a higher order; in its place, we have a “Rotting Pot” that injects “the lowest of instincts” in the minds of immigrants.

The Christian paradigm envisioned by Lapolla—that business should prosper by having a soul—provide just a wishful thinking for the future. What *The Grand Gennaro* accomplishes, however, is criticism toward the system of US capitalism while hinting at the presence of insurmountable barriers to social mobility. By choosing rags and junk as raw materials for Gennaro’s rise, and by stressing how they nurture the life of immigrants and educate them to a Hobbesian ethic, Lapolla reverses the paradigm by which ruling classes imposed an imagery of waste on immigrants and marginals—America, the writer seems to imply, is in a worse state of decay, and is in urgent need to be recycled.

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The volume collects contributions stretching from the Humanities to the Social Sciences and examines the challenging conjugation of two keywords in contemporary societies—*democracy* and *difference*. The overall project of this collection is to share knowledges and methodologies across disciplines, languages, and national cultures in order to investigate processes of homogenization and differentiation, and to embrace transnational, intercultural, and interdisciplinary perspectives. By exploring topics that are central to American Studies—including race/ethnicity, sex/gender, nationality, religion, language, landscape, migration, law, status, economy, dispossession, and expansion—and by engaging them both in English and Spanish, the collection aims to both foster cultural dialogue in an interconnected world and reflect the dynamism and instability of American Studies as a discipline that is constantly redrawn and redefined by a difficult yet fruitful interaction with diverse cultures, locations, and communities. This volume situates critique at the very heart of American Studies, not only to question and redraw the boundaries of this porous discipline, but also to point the way towards more hospitable configurations of the global world.