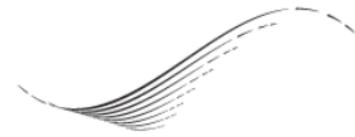


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Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies

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POSTMODERN SUBJECTIVITY
WITTGENSTEIN
EMBEDDED NARRATIVES
E-PISTOLARY
MIND, BODY, ACTION
OCEANVALE
NEOCOLONIALISM
DESIRE
RETURN OF THE SUBJECT
CORPOREALITY
GENDERED SUBALTERN
QUEER
EMBODIED EXPERIENCE
SHAME
IDENTITY OF ACTION
ANXIETY OF ACTION
EMBODIED NARRATIVES

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**LANGUAGE, LITERATURE,
AND
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES**

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Contents

- v *Editorial*
ix *Contributors*
x *Oceanvale Mentors and Contributors*

THE ERASURE OF SUBJECT: POSTMODERN REFLECTIONS

- 1 **“On the Vaporization and Centralization of the Self”: The Notion of the Subject in Modern Western Discourse**
Donato Loia
- 23 **Negotiating Subjectivity and Body: Access to an E-pistolary Corporeality**
Dong Xia
- 48 **Identity and Difference: Understanding Subjectivity through Wittgenstein’s Family Resemblances**
Paul Martorelli

SPECIAL SUBMISSIONS

- 71 **Image and Truth: Paradigms of Modern Translation Theory**
Rawad Alhashmi
- 90 **Written and Over-written: Investigating Metafictional Strategies in Janet Frame’s *The Carpathians***
Pooja Sancheti

OCEANVALE WORKSHOP

EXPLORING SUBJECTIVITY: MIND, BODY, ACTION

- 113 **Image, Language, and Subjectivity in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape***
Ananta Ahuja
- 124 **'There's a Special Kind of Monster that is a Woman': Locating Female Subjectivity in the Narrative of the Monstrous Murderess in Netflix's *Alias Grace***
Nikita Gloria Pinto
- 139 **Shame and the Failure of Recognition in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide***
Siddhant Datta
- 152 **Resistance as Embodied Experience: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice"**
Anoushka Sinha
- 161 **Exploring the Anxiety of Action in *Call Me by Your Name***
Suchandra Bose

EDITORIAL

Deeksha Suri and Md. Faizan Moquim

One of the most fundamental objects of reflection in the modern Western philosophy, the rational Subject, continues to be an inscrutable problem. Descartes's seeking of the Subject as the first principle of philosophy to situate certitude within rational Subject paradoxically finds the Subject itself as an immaterial, thinking substance which sets its agenda for next couple of centuries. Since then a range of exhaustive debates have spawned across many disciplines—present Issue included—with their focus on the Cartesian mapping of the Subject aimed at defining, containing, and rediscovering it.

The Cartesian overcoming of doubt to produce an autonomous, self-conscious Subject—outside of space, time, history, and corporeality—has witnessed radical challenges from within the Western philosophical discourse, spelt out by Paul Ricoeur in “Hermeneutics of Suspicion,” through Marx, Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud. Their reflections periodically shifted the focus of philosophical discourse back upon Subject and unearthed the unfrequented structures of conditions that have gone into the making of human subjectivity. Critiques of Subject by these thinkers also cleared the ground for subsequent enquiries of thinkers like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, etc., who engaged anew with the reformulations of the slippery binary of subject and object. It also paved way to Ricoeur's multiple strategies of reading and understanding the narratives of the Subject, laying bare the inner tensions that divide and unsettle its apparently consistent and coherent accounts. The project of modernity, inevitably a project of understanding the configurations of human Subject as its basis, thereafter generates a thematic of human subjectivity running through modern philosophy, literature, science, and social sciences in a fundamental way.

The narratives of rational ground of Subject and human subjectivity fork into two where one strand of theoretical encounters drift towards a preoccupation with the Subject's experiences of the threshold drawing towards an unconditional erasure bearing upon human finitude—from Kantian system's confrontation with the ‘sublime’ to Freud's encounter with the ‘uncanny.’ These accounts of Subject's fragility, bordering on its erasure, have with time established a normative trajectory that has forged itself into the rational foundation of Western philosophy. These theoretical encounters are balanced against contrary efforts to embody the immaterial rational Subject into an embodied one where, despite prophetic claims of its erasure, rational Subject not only

thrives but regulates still new ways of philosophizing about the constitution of Subject with relation to communities, classes, and cultures.

This dual trajectory of thought forms the terrain of Subject explored by the invited scholars who have teased out its various dimensions in their essays. In the themed section, Donato Loia's paper entitled "On the Vaporization and Centralization of the self: The Notion of the Subject in Modern Western Discourse" presents the dialectical tension between the contesting theories over the erasure and preservation of the Subject. A simultaneous discourse also discusses the representation of both the aspects within the visual medium. Studying the matrix of absence and presence, Dong Xia's paper entitled "Negotiating Subjectivity and Body: Access to E-pistolary Corporeality" carefully engages with new ways in which digital media constitute subjectivity as ushered in by the internet era. It provides a space for recontextualizing narrative in digital format that results in constant remaking of all the engaged aspects. Dealing with the issue of multiple identities, Paul Martorelli's paper "Identity and Difference: Understanding Subjectivity through Wittgenstein's Family Resemblances" contextualizes the perspectives on identity formation by questioning the notion of a 'particular identity' which resists containment in any category, especially in the case of a homosexual subject who is argued as a product of shared as well as exclusive orientations. All the papers in this section question the very attempt of constituting the Subject in closed brackets of identity by highlighting the nature of the Subject as fundamentally open-ended. The 'Subject' in these papers is attributed with a certain fluidity rather than limited to being a precipitate of social and cultural collectivity.

In the Special Submissions section, Rawad Alhashmi's paper "Image and Truth: Paradigms of Modern Translation Theory" develops a nuanced comparative reading of Ezra Pound's and Walter Benjamin's theory and practice of translation. The contrasting theories on fidelity and creation of an autonomous piece of art shapes their respective take on the role of the translator. Pooja Sancheti's paper entitled "Written and Overwritten: Investigating Metafictional Strategies in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*" deals with metafictional technique in post-modern fiction which lends various authorial levels to the text. It studies the implications of the same on structure and interpretation of the text when the authorial control, as the anchor of the text, is put in tension with layers of narrative voice.

This is LLIDS's second collaboration with the Oceanvale Workshop organized by Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi. Conceived under the theme 'Exploring Subjectivity: Mind, Body, and Action,' the papers in the Oceanvale section are connected with the thematic thread

of discussion on ‘subjectivity.’ The Subject is both the agent and receiver of experience, and the multidimensional understanding of the notion of the Subject poses a challenge to the idea of a ‘unified’ subjectivity. This collective attempt at engaging with subjectivity is reflected in each paper of the workshop. Within this section, Ananta Ahuja’s paper “Image, Language, and Subjectivity in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*” discusses the Beckettian subject, constructed through language and image. Patterns of continuity out of the moments in time configure and reconfigure the subjectivity of the evasive Subject. Nikita Pinto’s paper “‘There’s a Special Kind of Monster that is a Woman’: Locating Female Subjectivity in the Narrative of the Monstrous Murderess in Netflix’s *Alias Grace*” explores the cultural conceptions of female subjectivity. Transgressive women overturning the narratives of repression through agentive action forms the focal point of the study. The paper concerns itself with the existence of internally liberated women who pose an eternal threat to the narrow confinements of the social and moral order. Siddhanta Datta’s paper “Shame and Failure of Recognition in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*” is an enquiry on shame as an internalized emotion that disrupts the neocolonial project. It investigates the problem of identification within a culture that results in a sense of social fragmentation but can potentially lead to a sense of selfhood by creating a reflective Subject. Anoushka’s paper entitled “Resistance as Embodied Experience: A study of Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi” and “Behind the Bodice”” studies the idea of subjectivity as experienced through the ‘body’ which functions as the site of both oppression and resistance to the dominant socio-political power structures. It concentrates on the figure of female subaltern in both the works as victim as well as transcendent of the oppression induced by such power structures. Suchandra Bose’s paper entitled “Exploring the Anxiety of Action in *Call Me by Your Name*” studies the idea of subjectivity as instated through the body and how it is derived and projected through the subjective meaning in language. The paper attempts to study the physical and emotional space of queer desire, and the anxiety it creates in the Subject when strained against the limits imposed by social and cultural milieu, amidst the fear of being relegated as the ‘other.’ The Oceanvale section offers different perspectives on subjectivity taking up varied points of access such as sexuality, social restrictions, cultural connotations, etc. The thematic concern of this entire Issue is the exploration of the conditions of thinking about the ‘Subject.’ The idea behind the multitudinous dimensions of locating subjectivity engendered through alternate discourses is to foreground ‘suspicion’ towards unitary subjecthood.

This Issue marks the beginning of the Third Volume of LLIDS which will be exploring similar themes to sincerely attempt a contribution to

the prevalent discourse on Subject and the conditions and implications of its effacement. We owe gratitude to the Oceanvale team, its director, Dr. Sunjay Sharma, mentors: Dr. Baidik Bhattacharya, Professor Udaya Kumar, Professor V. Sanil, and scholars for their continued collaboration and tireless efforts towards publishing rigorous research papers. We wish all the readers an enriching reading experience.

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“On the Vaporization and Centralization of the Self”: The Notion of the Subject in Modern Western Discourse

Donato Loia

Any elaboration on the meaning of the term “subjectivity” cannot be detached from the problem that subjectivity poses for itself. The same might be said about other word-concepts such as “identity,” “self,” and “consciousness.” In spite of their different meanings, these terms share statuses as battlefields of warring definitions and interpretations. Broadly speaking, critical theory and philosophy have approached subjectivity through two different perspectives. While one perspective has focused predominantly on subjectivity as autonomous, the other has seen the “subject” mostly as a consequence of a set of determinations, as a product of a number of “dispositifs.”¹ The contraposition between an autonomous and a non-autonomous subjectivity can be aptly summarized with a notable motto from Charles Baudelaire’s intimate diary *My Heart Laid Bare* (1897): “On the vaporization and centralization of the *Self (Moi)*. Everything is there” (qtd. in Seigel 494). As this article will argue, critical contributions have narrowed down their perspectives to an overtly rigid contraposition between “vaporization” *or* “centralization,” considering non-autonomy and autonomy of the subject as two mutually exclusive realms. In doing so, critical studies have often been neglectful to notice that vaporization *and* centralization are in a dialectical tension; both co-participate in the formation of the subject.

This paper argues that it is impossible to cleanly separate the category of the subject from a dimension simultaneously autonomous *and* non-autonomous. Any mutually exclusive contraposition would not pass any critical scrutiny. After starting with a brief introduction to the notion of the autonomous subject, this paper will then describe some crucial arguments that have validated the decentering of the subject-centered paradigm. Each section identifies the limits of both autonomous and non-autonomous paradigms, illustrating these paradigms with visual case studies. Lastly, this paper offers a more sophisticated argument for initiating a conversation on the question of the

¹The expression “dispositifs” relates to Michel Foucault’s theory. Simply put, a “dispositif” is a social apparatus that *makes* one see, think, act. Every “apparatus” or “dispositif” has an historical nature and, among other scopes, contributes to processes of subjectivization. For an introduction to the “dispositifs” see Foucault 1978 and Deleuze 1992.

subject beyond the strict contraposition of autonomy and non-autonomy.

In continental philosophy, the paradigm of the autonomy of subject is traditionally associated with René Descartes's (1596–1650) ideas in his *Discourse on Method* (1637) and *Meditations on the First Philosophy* (1641). Descartes famously subjected all human knowledge to rigorous skepticism, finally concluding that we can only be certain of our own existence through the act of a thinking “I.” Descartes's “I” is fully-conscious, self-aware, self-knowable, and autonomous. As Kaja Silverman in *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983) neatly summarizes, “[Descartes's *Discourse*] offers us a narrator who...speaks without simultaneously being spoken, who believes himself to exist outside of discourse” (Silverman 128). According to Descartes, “Mankind” is a transcendental entity non-culturally and non-historically specific. The “I,” in particular, is a “thinking I” who forms reality starting from his or her own representations; the “I” is the site of personal identity and the unifying principle behind the experience (Silverman 128).

It is commonly accepted that a number of historical, social, and theoretical factors enabled the development of the Cartesian *cogito*. In the essay “The Questions of Cultural Identity” (1996), the cultural theorist Stuart Hall calls upon a number of key events to contextualize Descartes's autonomous subject: the rise of Humanism during the Renaissance which accorded the highest position to a fully stable and autonomous individual; the Reformation and Protestantism which set the individual conscience free from external forms of authority such as the Roman Catholic church; the rise of Modern Science which considered mankind capable of an autonomous investigation of the mysteries of a de-sacralized natural order; and, finally, the progressive development of Enlightenment, which trusted in human being's ability to completely detach him/herself from prejudices and traditions and rely on his or her own intellectual and rational abilities (Hall 602–603). As this historical summary demonstrates, the formation of the category of a sovereign and autonomous subject acquired its distinctive qualities through a timeframe that anticipates and goes well beyond Cartesian philosophy. More importantly, the idea of an “autonomous subject” is important as a trans-historical concept referring to any individual who is able to distinguish his or her own actions and beliefs from collective beliefs, authorities, and consolidated traditions. Thus, the notion of an “autonomous subject” is also related to notions of self realization and self actualization of the individual.

Within the history of art similar conception of the question of subjectivity can be witnessed. The art historian George Heard Hamilton in his *Painting and Sculpture in Europe 1880-1945* (1993) describes how an “epistemological turn” occurred between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many artists, instead of concentrating on the phenomenal world, redirected their attention towards their inner experiences. Among the many artists he mentions, Hamilton discusses Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), who wrote that he could not and did not want to merely represent what he saw in front of his eyes, but instead to express his feelings forcibly by use of arbitrary colours (Hamilton 157). Likewise, Henri Matisse (1869–1954) in *Notes d’un Peintre*, published in 1908, wrote that he could not distinguish between the feeling that he had for life and his way of representing it (Hamilton 169). Examples that address the autonomous expression of an artist, beyond and before the early twentieth century, are just as plentiful. According to the art critic Harold Rosenberg, the works of Jackson Pollock are not mere representation of a subject or an investigation of the opacity of the medium, but are rather the trace of an event, a gestural occurrence in which the canvas becomes an arena to register the spontaneous and accidental marks of the individuality of the painter (Rosenberg 581). The categorical homogeneity of the label “Abstract Expressionism,” that is used to join together artists as diverse as Rothko, Newman, Pollock, and de Kooning among others, reminds us of their search for a distinctively autonomous, subjective mark. As Rosenberg writes: “The act-painting is of the same metaphysical substance as the artist’s existence” (Rosenberg 582). Of course, this artistic existence is bound up in the influence artists had on each other, discourses within the artistic community, and the limitations and inspirations of their chosen artistic media and technology. Nevertheless, many artists’ and critics’ statements stressing the importance of self-realization and autonomous expression prepared this attitude. As art historian Richard Shiff reminds us in an essay on the loaded notion of “originality,” Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) claimed that he aspired to imitate “anything but himself;” the critic Théophile Thoré (1807–1869) characterized original artists as “sons of no one;” and Édouard Manet (1832–1883) once represented his aesthetic by stating that he “sought simply to be himself and not another” (Shiff 2003, 150). These statements buttress, so to say, the transcendental quality of the marks left by gestural painters on their works in the mid-twentieth century, among them is de Kooning’s 1960 lithograph entitled *Waves #1* (Fig. 1). At the risk of overly simplifying a piece as the mere illustration of a theory, De Kooning’s lithograph, for the purposes of this essay, is most interesting for the way the piece’s gestural quality expresses a subjectivity that imitates, in principle, “anything but himself.” De Kooning’s visual representation, here, renders and confirms the sub-

ject, paradoxically, objectifying the subject so as to prove its existence as a “subject.”² In short, the emphasis on the artist’s subjectivity and ability to manifest inner experience acquired tremendous relevance in modern art. In the words of social art historian Meyer Schapiro (1904–1996), “the movement of modern art had therefore an ethical content...the individual’s self-realization was the central problem” (Schapiro 152–154).

Now, one cannot overestimate the centrality of the self-sufficient subject to the art and culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For just as many philosophical contributions, critical studies, literary and artistic works have directed their attention to the vaporization and fragmentation of the subject. From Arthur Rimbaud’s famous “Je est un autre” (I is an other) to Émile Durkheim’s idea that the individual is nothing more than the consequence of society’s organization, from Carl Jung’s understanding of the “individual psyche” commencing from a “collective psyche” to Jacques Lacan’s understanding of the “self” as “wholly other” whose access is only a mirage—the reasons for vaporization seem to have dominated the conversations about the subject during the twentieth century (Siegel 482). Continuing in the tradition of continental philosophy, crucial figures, prominently Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, undertook a project “...to displace the human subject from the central position it had occupied in philosophy since Descartes, and to replace the notion of stable selfhood with a different, fluid, and ‘temporal’ understanding of the self” (Siegel 568). As famously discussed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927), the problem with the Cartesian *cogito* is that it is simply wrong (Heidegger 1996, 21–23). Heidegger does not use the term “subject” or “individual” because they are both affiliated with the Cartesian heritage. Instead, he prefers the term *Dasein*, “Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1996, 39–48), by which he means that there is really no such thing as a subject detached from the world, the body, temporality, and the experience of one’s ordinary, daily activities. In addition, the analytic of *Dasein* investigates a holistic system of belief called by Heidegger *um-Welt* (the surrounding world), the pre-ontology.³ *Dasein* is always temporalized and embodied in a specific world-system. Thus, *Dasein* is never a “pure” disengaged subject nor the materializa-

²Of course, other interpretations have undermined the rigid correspondence between pictorial marks and the transcendental manifestation of a subject. For an analysis of de Kooning’s work is not grounded in similar concepts, but rather in sensory engagements, see Shiff 2011. For an opposite overview of the Abstract Expressionists’ engagement with subjectivity, see Leja 1993.

³For a brief overview of “the idea of background” that refers to Heideggerian philosophy and the discussion over this notion in relation to other prominent figures such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Charles Taylor, see Gordon 2008.

tion of existence *as such*. Instead of speaking in terms of an autonomous subject, Heidegger's philosophy opened up the space for a phenomenological understanding and investigation of the materialized activity of existence (Dreyfus 13–29).

Just as there are historical reasons for the development of the “autonomous” subject, so too are there many historical motivations to explain the progressive decentering of the subject. According to the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984) such reasons can be identified in the development of three disciplines during the twentieth century: ethnology, psychoanalysis, and semiology. As Foucault writes in *The Order of Things* (1966):

[Psychoanalysis and ethnology never]...come near to a general concept of man: at no moment do they come near to isolating a quality in him that is specific, irreducible and uniformly valid wherever he is given to experience... Not only they are able to do without the concept of man, they are also unable to pass through it, for they always address themselves to that which constitutes his outer limits...[they show that] the signifying chain by which the unique experience of the individual is constituted is perpendicular to the formal system on the basis of which the significations of a culture are constituted... (Foucault 1971, 379–380).

What Foucault argues here is that the above mentioned disciplines do not provide a well-established number of qualities that a-historically could be applied to the category of the “subject.” Thus, “man” appears as the product of certain historically-determined discourses, and the category of the “subject” calls into question notions of a private and self-conscious individuality. As a corollary to Foucault's passage, one should also consider that even desire becomes culturally instigated and, hence, collective. Three brief examples related to the disciplines Foucault identified further illustrate how multiple historical and theoretical occurrences participate in the development of this decentered idea of the “subject.”

First, Sigmund Freud's work *The Resistance to Psychoanalysis* (1925) furnishes an overview of the three “blows to human dignity” that destabilized a coherent notion of “subjectivity.” These “blows” include the Copernican revolution which displaced man from the central position in a divinely-ordered world; the Darwinian revolution which overturned man's confidence in his status as a being created and appointed by God to have dominion over his creation; and, finally, the psycho-analytical revolution which blew away the last vestiges of

mankind's pride, uprooting even our own control over our actions. With these three revolutions "mankind" is definitively humbled. With the discovery of the "unconscious," in particular, conversation about a "stable," "unified," "autonomous subject" cannot be taken for granted anymore (Freud 222–233). Instead of stressing the unifying capacity of the "I," for Freud, the "I," notably is a component of the psychic apparatus of the human being. It is true that Freud and, in general, psychoanalysts do not deny the existence of subjectivity, but rather they multiply and fragment the layers of subjectivity and illuminate its complexity.

Second, ethnology does not approach the question of the subject by trying to reach a general definition of the concept "man," but rather it concentrates its attention on the social, cultural, and historically specific conditions which determine the formation of a particular and time-bound idea of "identity." The work of ethnologist Marcel Mauss refers to the notion of the person as a "category of the human mind" which indicates the invalidity of every discussion related to the question of the "origin" and "definition" of the subject. Mauss notices, for example, that in the Native American Group of the Kwakiutl every person changes their name according to the phase of their life and, therefore, one person—both man and woman—might have different names in their childhood, in their mature life, and older life. Moreover, each individual in the Native American Group of the Kwakiutl has a name for each season, one for the summer and another one for the winter, and so on (Mauss 7–8). According to Mauss, for specific cultural communities the notion of "persona" is strictly intertwined with the social role (*personage*). As an instance, Mauss also points to the development of the Roman Code of Law which established the division between *personae*, *res*, and *actiones*. In this case, slaves are considered *res* because they do not have any right to a body and a name. On the other hand, the division between *personae* and *actiones* was useful for identifying people's responsibility over their actions. With the Roman Code of Law the "person" is more than a name or a right to assume a social role. For the Latins, the person refers to the identity between an individual and his or her own actions (Mauss 14–17). The comparison between the Native American Group and the Roman Code of Law with its understanding of the notion of *persona* as both social and forensic does not indicate that one notion of subjectivity might be more or less authentic than another. As the title of Mauss' text reminds us, they are only different "categories" of the human mind.

Third, semiology makes us consider that language itself participates into the process of subjectivization. In the famous words of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, "we can only use language to

produce meanings by positioning ourselves within the rules of language and the systems of meaning of our culture. Language is a social, not an individual system. It pre-exists us. We cannot in any simple sense be its authors..." (qtd. in Hall 608). In this sense, if our own identity and subjectivity is a consequence of our own language and language "pre-exists us," identity itself is a consequence of language, a point this essay will further discuss.

The relationships between psychoanalysis, ethnology, and semiology provide convincing arguments to question the idea of an "autonomous subject." But a thorough critique of such a notion must also take into consideration a more strictly political content. Again, Foucault's work has been fundamental for considering what is at stake politically for the notion of the subject. Foucault's method is "consistently materialist" which means that it does not search for formal structures with universal value, but rather it is an "...historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying" (Foucault 1984, 46). A recurrent question for such a materialist approach is: how does power historically and socially circulate, spread, adapt, and shape subjects? Setting aside his broader discussion on the notion of Biopolitics,⁴ Foucault considers that power has always tried to exercise a form of control over and access to "...the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behavior" (Foucault 1984, 67). At least from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the human being's singularity has become even more a function of pressing questions related to demography, public health, hygiene, housing conditions, longevity, and so on. The expression used by Foucault to define these procedures of power centered on the body as a machine that has to be disciplined, optimized, made docile, and integrated into a system of efficient and economic controls are "*anatomo-politics of the human body* [and] *biopolitics of the population*" (Foucault 1978, 139). According to Foucault, in every society bodies are objects of pressing attentions, prohibitions or obligations, but during the eighteenth century, the body has become even more intensely subjected in order to make it more obedient, healthier, and more productive (Foucault 1984, 180–182). The modern ambition of power structures is not 'simply' to repress, but to discipline and to 'normalize'; to develop "an art of correct training" (Foucault 1984, 188). With a reference to our own time, one might say that in late capitalism opinions, fantasies, and even the desires of the bodies fall under an economic domain in a managed way, and can be destabilized and disciplined through fake news, Big Data,

⁴For an introduction to the concept of Biopolitics, see Foucault 1991 and Lemke 2001.

and forms of techno-scientific anesthetization. For this reason, Foucault's materialist approach is detached from any idea of the *authenticity* of the subject. The self and the subject are products of power structures.

In order to further illustrate how the “subject,” far from being an autonomous entity, is politically and historically constituted, consider the example of a 1925 employment chart of the Central Tube Company in Pittsburgh reprinted in *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1920* (1982). In this employment chart, “races” are ranked according to their fitness for different job types and working conditions. For instance, Armenians are defined as “good” in none of the twenty job categories; Italians could not handle serving as helpers for engineers; Jewish people supposedly do not fit in any industrial jobs; Black workers are considered “good” in certain occupations “requiring speed” and in a “hot,” “dusty,” “polluted atmosphere,” but finally are marked as “unadaptable” in every listed skilled position. White Americans, instead, excel in every voice of the chart. This chart represents a visual demonstration of what Foucault called “*anatomo-politics of the human body* [and] *biopolitics of the population*.” The chart is a visual example of Foucault's assertion that: “for capitalist society is the biopolitical that is important before everything else; the biological, the somatic, the corporeal. The body is a biopolitical reality...” (Foucault 2000, 137). The chart naturalizes a racist ranking in which White Americans and other “races” are at the top of this schema according to a biological and corporeal “logic.” Simultaneously, a more subtle form of racism affects *every* subject—White Americans included—which becomes a mere function of “adaptability to working conditions.” In a biopolitical form of industry, as the Central Tube Company of Pittsburgh in 1925, human beings have no agency *per se*. All the “races” become a function of more pressing questions related to productivity, economic growth, and establishment of racial forms of privilege or disadvantage.

While in some ways less dramatic than the case of the employment chart of the Central Tube Company, the history of art provides examples that might more clearly illustrate the idea of a decentered subject, just as it did for the “autonomous” subject. As we saw earlier with Rosenberg's investigation of Abstract Expressionism, one important artistic trend has been for early and mid-twentieth century art to rest “...on the romantic assumption that meaningful subject matter emanates from the individual” (Fineberg 206). But, as Jonathan Fineberg clearly summarizes in his *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being*, the art of Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) or Jasper Johns, among others, called into question the centrality of the autonomous

subject, seeing it instead as a nexus of information, reorienting input rather than originating content. For instance, in Rauschenberg's *Estate* (1963) (Fig. 2) autobiographical references are inserted into the array of anonymous images, and matter related to the artist's life is combined with matter originating from the material milieu in which he lived. Even though the co-existence of the individual and the public is integral to Rauschenberg's imagination, any reading of his work as having a stable meaning, as arising from the artist's inner self would be questionable (Potts 268–269). Likewise, Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997), and other American Pop artists also followed suit with their denial of individuality through anesthetizing repetitions of images.⁵ Finally, art historian Micheal Leja also notices that fragmentation, disintegration, and loss of autonomy had already begun earlier in the artworks of Abstract Expressionists and will continue well beyond the reign of American Pop Artists (Leja 331). As Barbara Rose considers in the famous essay “ABC Art,” published in 1965, “Minimal Art” was an “...art whose blank, neutral, mechanical impersonality contrasts so violently with the romantic, biographical abstract expressionist style which preceded it that spectators are chilled by its apparent lack of feeling or content” (qtd. in Fineberg 294). Distrust of the idea of “modern originality” followed an equal dissatisfaction with the concept of subjectivity itself, as the works of artists such as Sherri Levine or Vija Celmins have more recently testified.

Critics have raised legitimate issues with this second paradigm of the “non-autonomous subject” and its overemphasis on the subject's inaccessibility and constructed nature. But how can we affirm the certain existence of structures of power as pervasive elements in the formation of subjectivities and, at the same time, *allow* for subjects' critical and autonomous action? A similar question has been fundamental to the work of philosopher Amy Allen, among others. In *The Politics of Our Selves. Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (2008), Allen begins her investigation with a recurrent question for theorists interested in Foucault's legacy: if power is everywhere, is it possible to liberate ourselves from its oppressive aspects through specific techniques and critical thinking? How do we pursue a history of the structures of power while reaffirming the possibility for the subjects to have a positive, critical agency? According to Allen, Foucault relied on an “...overly narrow conception of the social, one that tends to equate *all* social relations with strategic relations of power” (Allen 174, emphasis added). In other terms, Allen considers that for Foucault every social relation *is* a relation of power and subordina-

⁵For a similar discussion see Foster 2012.

tion (Allen 70). At the same time, Foucault's later work grants some autonomy of action to the subject which is not reduced to a mere *fiction* and consequence of structures of power (Foucault 2003, 146-147).⁶

The ideas of "self-transformation" and "care of the self" speculate on the possibility of an empowered idea of subjectivity (Foucault 2003, 146). As explored by Michael Kelly, Foucault's ideas of "care of the self" and "self-transformations" describe the possibility for a subject to create a relationship with the self through "curative and therapeutic" modes, "critical thinking," and "struggle" (201). The process of "self-transformation" is more widely defined by Foucault as a method of "unlearning" the array of bad habits and dispositions a subject accumulates. In addition, Mark G. E. Kelly's essay on "Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technology of the Self" clarifies that the subject for Foucault is "something that must be constructed" (513). Concomitantly, the possibility of the subject to constitute itself is what Foucault calls "self-transformation" which has to pass through an "ethical conduct." Whereby for "ethics" Foucault does not mean "a set of rules" that have to be followed, but rather a relation of the self with his or her own self, that is, a form of "care of the self" (Kelly 517). Even if these propositions testify to an interest on Foucault's side in a new conception of subjectivity through a relation of the self with the self, one of the major problems in Foucault's analysis of the notion of "self-transformation" remains that it happens exclusively at the individual level without any reference to the social. As Allen noticed, Foucault seems to be limited by a rather narrow idea of social interaction and "...remains hesitant about embracing such a normative ideal of reciprocity" (70). Ultimately, for Foucault, relationships are always strategic and dangerous.

If it is true that the social, historical, and material conditions of existence influence the speaking subject, it is equally important not to reduce the subject to nothing more than a fully determined factor. As the philosopher Linda Alcoff has written: "... there is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says ..." (6). At the same time, Alcoff's analysis also refuses any essentialism and determinism, and "...to say that location *bears* on meaning and truth is not the same as saying that location *determines* meaning and truth" (16). The illusion of an authentic subjectivity

⁶Allen's critique could certainly transfer to Jacques Lacan who considered the subject completely *subordinated to* and *spoken by* the unconscious. The "I" for Lacan should not be considered as a *subject*, but as *subjected*. For an introduction to Lacan's conception of the subject see Dean 1992.

completely detachable from others is as questionable as a completely erased subject whose shape is utterly constructed.⁷

Between these—the authentic, detached subject and the utterly constructed, erased subject—there is room for a more robust notion of subjectivity, one holds in itself the dialectical tension of “vaporization” and “centralization.” Thinkers have stressed a number of elements that would be needed in such a multidimensional theory of the subject. First, it would require something like the positions elaborated by the sociologists George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and Charles Cooley (1864–1927) who support the idea of subjectivity as interactive, that is, formed at the intersection of self and world, something given to the subject and something constructed by the subject (Hall 597). Subjectivity still has an inner core, but it is formed in or modified by a continuous dialogue with the world—world, in its broadest possible sense understood as institutions, technologies, the body, and so on. A similar notion of interactivity could be related to the ideas of the French linguist Benveniste and Cooley himself whereby they consider the linguistic correlation between *I* and *You*. The linguists’ over-emphasis on language as the only way to have access to the subject and, more precisely, their assumption that “identity” is nothing more than the pronouns “I,” “me,” “mine,” “you,” “she,” “he,” etc., is certainly questionable (Cooley 163). For instance, people often individuate, identify, and define a person by sight alone and without any direct use of language. In addition, Stuart Hall reminds us that “most modern nations consist of disparate cultures which were only unified by a lengthy process of violent conquest - that is, by the forcible suppression of cultural difference” (616). “Identity” is more than a linguistic construction. But what is useful is the acknowledgement that the pronoun *I* is used in the discourse *in principle* and *always* referring to a present, non-present, or implicit *You*. In other words, the condition of the subject is inherently *intersubjective*. As noticed by Benveniste, in world languages we find instances—Farsi or Chinese serve as examples of this—in which we are missing the linguistic division among genders “he” or “she”; however, we do not know any language missing the distinction/relation between *I-You* (Benveniste 225). The “others” are

⁷Undoubtedly, more critiques might be moved to this paradigm of the non-autonomous subject. For instance, both structuralism and poststructuralism have often supported that such a notion is a mere linguistic construction. From Heidegger’s phrase the “Language is the House of Being” (Heidegger 217) to Émile Benveniste (1902–1976)’s statement that “*Ego* is he who says *ego*” (Benveniste 224), such over-emphasis on language has become, today, a strong cliché in the philosophical circles.

never simply external to me, but rather they help constitute my own selfhood.⁸

The emphasis on language and intersubjectivity opens the door to another major discussion point, that is, the role of “narrative” for the constitution of the subject. In the essay, “Narrative Identity,” Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) argues that identity is always something fixed as the characters of a story yet it is able to change according to new circumstances (188). Charles Taylor, like Ricoeur, in *Sources of the Self* (1989) incisively states: “...we grasp our lives in a narrative... In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become [who we are], and of where we are going” (47). “We” is an important indicator of Taylor’s thought because it suggests that we “...can only learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness...are through my and others’ experience of these being objects of us, in some common space” (35). The sense of ourselves necessarily passes through a “story” that we narrate to ourselves and to others. As Ricoeur puts it, narrative identity’s particular utility lies in its capacity to allow both stability and change. As scholar Gerald Izenberg posits about narrative identity, “...a character in a story, and in life, is to some extent fixed, pushed along by its inner dynamic, yet is also able to alter itself in the face of new circumstances. Sameness-identity is indispensable to narrative identity: without it, we would not be ‘characters’ and we could therefore not have stories” (9).

Finally, a fourth major aspect needed for the conception of subjectivity, both autonomous and non-autonomous, can be drawn by returning to Foucault’s notion of “care of the self.” Through a reading of Ancient Greek Philosophy, Foucault suggests that the famous Socratic motto *gnothi seauton* (“Know thyself”) was part of a greater and even more important project: the *epimeleia heautou* (the “Care of the Self”), that is, a list of well-defined actions which aimed at the perfectibility and care of the mankind (Foucault 2005, 4). These two realms—the *gnothi seauton* (“Know thyself”) and the *epimeleia heautou* (the “Care of the Self”)—are not separated, but rather one self-knowledge can be acquired only through the care of one-self. In this sense, the *epimeleia heautou* pre-dates and determines the *gnothi seauton*. What is also fascinating in Foucault’s thesis is that classical philosophy is detached from a contemplative purpose and it becomes a philosophy as a way of

⁸As Jean-Luc Nancy reminds us, in rather Heideggerian terms, “community means...that there is no singular being without another singular being, and that there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originally or ontological ‘sociality’ that in its principle extends far beyond the simple theme of man as a social being” (Nancy 66).

living based around a number of spiritual exercises, including meditation, political discussion, abstinence from food, sex and pleasure, journal writing, rumination about death. The goal of such *epimeleia heautou* was intended to help the subjects to gain control over their own thoughts, emotions, words, desires, fears, and so on. Foucault defines the “care of the self” in terms of “...those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre” (Foucault 1986, 10). The paradigmatic shift proposed by Foucault is to consider the “self” not as an object of rational apprehension, but an aim, a scope, an endless task for a better life.

The four principles listed here—*interactivity*, *intersubjectivity*, *narrative-mediated*, and *in need of care*—do not provide a non-historical and transcendental understanding of the notion of the subject. At the same time, these principles should limit and cut out the two extreme paradigms considered in the first half of this essay: that the subject is a fully-conscious, autonomous agent, detached from external determinations and that the “subject” is a mere construction of historical forces or an impossible “other.” It is precisely the tension between “vaporization” and “centralization,” the contrast between different forces and worldviews that should be ultimately stressed as the distinctive trait of the notion of the subject. Finally, these four principles—defined as constituents of subjectivity—are interlocked and intertwined. They do not constitute separate realms that separately fashion the subject. They are rather woven together and surround the processes of subjectivization like a glove surrounds a hand. In other words, the question of the subject cannot be thought of separately as, on the one hand, a theory of the interaction among subjects and, on the other, a theory of the subject’s relation with him or herself and the environment. One is a subject only in relation to other subjects. At the same time, the interaction between subjects and technologies contribute to the development of potentialities, to forms of empowerment and *centralization* of the subject as much as to forms of anesthetization and *vaporization* of the subject.⁹ Any discourse on the subject cannot be limited either to a process of intersubjective formation or to the interaction of the subject with his or her technological habitat. Further, a person’s internalized and evolving life story in which the past is integrated within some sort of more or less coherent narrative actively participates in the process of identity formation too (McAdams and McLean 2013). But subjectivity cannot be reduced to a linguistic, nar-

⁹For a discussion of the coupling development of potentialities and development of anesthetization see Montani 2007.

rative mode either, because it is an active practice, a business in which the subject, ideally, creates a relationship with the self through curative and therapeutic modes. As Foucault notices, in order for the subject to constitute itself, it has to pass through “ethical conduct” that calls for a relation of the self with his or her own self (Kelly 517). The principles of *interactivity*, *intersubjectivity*, *narrative-mediation*, and *in need of care* co-participate to the process of subject-formation, but in different degrees and not always simultaneously. It is important to imagine a process of interplay among these formative forces. These certainly are simplifications, but they are meant to map the major arguments at stake in debates about the concept of the subject.

One final visual example might further illuminate the principles of *interactivity*, *intersubjectivity*, *narrative-mediated*, and *in need of care* that, in principle, are at work with the subject. In 2012, the engineer and designer Salvatore Iaconesi was diagnosed with brain cancer. After having left the hospital and received the digital medical records, Iaconesi decided to upload html and jpeg files on a website that he created, “La-Cura.it.” On the website, Iaconesi invited users to download, reuse, re-elaborate, and re-upload those files. In a message, he also asked the users to not treat him strictly as a victim of a disease or an ill person. The quality of replies received by Iaconesi is not important to this study. Some people suggested alternative ways of curing his cancer, others sent poems, while some users, instead, created printed 3D object of his cancer or revitalized the X-Ray of his brain through colorful insertion.¹⁰ In 2015, Iaconesi was finally operated upon and, today, he is well and alive. He continues working on the collaborative project of “La-Cura.it.”

What is Iaconesi telling us about subjectivity with his work? On a material level, Iaconesi decided to objectify, as much as possible, the diseased part of his body through a form of collective and intersubjective mediation, as demonstrated by the printed 3D object. But Iaconesi did not escape or refuse his medical condition through a virtualized and illusionary self. He underwent all the necessary cures that a medical institution (a *dispositif*) could offer him. Simultaneously, Iaconesi initiated a therapeutic process of self-transformation by deciding not to merely accept the condition of the “diseased person/subject” broadly defined by society. The “interactive” component at work in Iaconesi’s example refers to the social engagement that he activated by sharing his personal medical records and allowing people to reuse them. For instance, Lichty’s 3D replica of Iaconesi’s brain tumor at 500% scale might have participated into a broader, self-

¹⁰See (Fig. 3).

therapeutic change in Iaconesi's consciousness. At the same time, what is "interactive" is Iaconesi's approach to himself who, on the one hand, accepts the institutional cures of a medical apparatus and, on the other hand, triggers new cures through the technological apparatus of the web. It is beyond the scope of this essay to understand how powerful participants' contribution has been in alleviating and even "curing" Iaconesi of his cancer. Perhaps, the sculptural 3D replica participated to Iaconesi's therapeutic process of elaboration and care of the self. In the context of this essay, what counts most is the implicit message that Iaconesi offers about the notion of subjectivity as something in need of care, mediation, and that necessarily passes through other people's recognition. Iaconesi's project offers an image of subjectivity as something constructed, and not only found. If subjectivity has to be considered through "the historical variable practices of self-constitution" (Kelly 517), Iaconesi's use of the internet and new media materializes a similar process of self- and collective constitution with curative finalities. Through *La-Cura.it*, Iaconesi claimed a more positive, social, and intersubjective agency. Self-realization, in Iaconesi's project, passes through collective realization. As Foucault reminds us, one of the most important aspects of the care of the self is that "it constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true social practice" (Foucault 1988, 51). Iaconesi demonstrates that "care" is not the activity of solitary, narcissistic individual, but that of a subject who is able to consider his or her life as a material and a source to be shaped through collective effort. Thinking more specifically about the notion of "care of the self" and how it operates within Iaconesi's example, the subject appears more than a "thing," a state or identity, but as a process of self-transformation. Foucault reminds that the "...art of existence...is dominated by the principle that says one must 'take care of oneself'" (Foucault 1988, 43). Iaconesi's project is intimately intertwined with his own existence and, at the same time, it has implications that transcend his own particular position. For what the project demonstrates is that one ought to attend to oneself beyond—which does not necessarily mean against—the set of rules that can be predetermined by an institutional apparatus, like the hospital. Finally, "...the term *epimeleia* designates not just a preoccupation but a whole set of occupations...*epimeleia* implies a labor" (Foucault 1988, 50). Likewise, Iaconesi's work does not only designate a form of preoccupation of Iaconesi himself towards his own health. It produces a "labor" in the actual, material sense of the term in which the designer engages himself through a whole set of occupations, such as sharing his own personal story, relating to the responses of other users, elaborating and building on his own personal experience through talks and papers, and so on. In sum, Iaconesi's work on *La-Cura.it* in the form of videos, articles, and public lectures also demonstrates the importance of narra-

tive-identity for the formation of the subject. *La-Cura.it* proposes a sophisticated understanding of the “subject,” not as something “authentic” per se or strictly autonomous, neither as irremediably defined by “structures of power” and society at large. Iaconesi’s project gives us a better insight into the notion of “subject,” as a continuous, complicated, collective, coercitive, fallible, and, at times, successful process.¹¹ In Foucault’s discussion, the care of the self is an ancient ideal, but Iaconesi’s project demonstrates that it can continue to inspire modern life too.

The “everything is there” of Baudelaire’s motto that began this paper would seem to point to a model of subjectivity this paper is offering: for “vaporization” and “centralization” *co-participate* to the formation of the subject. The “everything” that is “there” refers to the active capacity of the subject to shape the reality (“everything”) according to his or her own centralized positions. But the “everything” also refers to the forces within society and within the human being itself that tend to the “vaporization” of the subject itself. Ultimately, what Baudelaire’s motto reminds us is that *subjectivity is a battle-field*.



¹¹For a discussion of Iaconesi’s project see: Pietro Montani, “Reality, Authenticity, and Images’ Authentication,” 16–17 June, Istituto Svizzero in Rome. Online Video Clip. *YouTube*, Jul. 11 2016. Web. Oct. 19 2019.

List of Figures



Fig. 1 Willem de Kooning, *Litho #1 (Waves #1)*, 1960, lithograph, 45 13/16 x 31 3/4 in, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Source: Wikimedia Commons Public Domain.



Fig. 2 Robert Rauschenberg, *Estate*, 1963, Oil and silkscreen ink on canvas, 95 3/4 x 69 3/4 inches, (243.2 x 177.2 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Source: Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.



Fig. 3 Patrick Lichty, 3D replica of Iaconesi's brain tumor at 500% scale from Iaconesi, Salvatore, Persico, Oriana, (2012, September 10, Open Source) La-Cura.it. Retrieved from <http://la-cura.it>

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Negotiating Subjectivity and Body: Access to an E-pistolary Corporeality

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The interplay between absence and presence is a prominent motif in epistolary fictions. The epistles are the field where the actual and corporeal bodies of the interlocutors are absent, yet are experienced as present, through imagination nurtured by the two parties as well as through rhetorical strategies and cultural practices. Additionally, this illusion of presence is magnified when the technological infrastructure runs smoothly and functionally to disembodify itself so that authentic and immediate images of the writers can be generated. As such, the mail, be it electronic or snail mail, always writes an interaction between presence and absence, human and technology, materiality and discursivity. These thematic topics are registered and negotiated in the two email novels,¹ *The Metaphysical Touch* (1998) by Sylvia Brownrigg and *The Correspondence Artist* (2011) by Barbara Browning. Through employing email as “the communicative features that generate narration” (Keskinen 383), the two novels recontextualise epistolary practices in the burgeoning digital environment and explore the shifting meaning of presence and absence under new technological conditions. The focus of this analysis of e-pistolary lies in the tensions between discursivity and materiality, when writing and information technology converge in the literary space. However, instead of resolving these tensions, this paper examines how print literature is affected by digital modes of inscription both textually and materially. This paper pursues two central inquiries through the reading of the two novels: 1) how email, along with other forms of electronic writings, redefines concepts of authorship and textualities; 2) how new technologies structure and reconfigure our perceptions of the body.

Despite much critical attention that e-pistolary fiction attracts, analyses mostly deal with how emails are distinct from traditional letters and the development of email as a technology remains underexplored.² These two particular novels are chosen due to the thirteen-

¹In this article, “email novels” or “e-pistolary novels” refers to works which employ email as “the communicative features that generate narration” (Keskinen 383), and which incorporate email both as a theme and as a form in the writing.

²See, for example: Sunka, Simon. *Mail-Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture*. State University of New York Press, 2002; Keskinen, Mikko. “E-Pistolary and E-Loquency: Sylvia Brownrigg’s *The Metaphysical Touch* as a Novel of Letters and Voices in the Age of E-mail Communication.” *Critique*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2004, pp. 383–404; Tokizane, Sanae. “Epistolary of Email.” *Exegesis*, vol. 22, 2016, pp. 142–56. These writings work in depth on the synchronic interplay between creative writ-

year gap in their publication, during the course of which significant changes in the email system and Internet had taken place which shall be registered by comparing them. N. Katherine Hayles's theorisation of digital textuality is helpful to chart the technological gap between the two novels. She suggests that information paradigm has become the dominant cultural model, and accordingly the information-theoretic terms of pattern and randomness emerge as the new epistemological mode and challenge what is now understood as the metaphysics of presence. Derrida, in the wake of Heidegger, sees all forms of Western metaphysics as the variants of this conceptual order which favours what is present, unmediated, and self-evident against what is absent, mediated, and represented (*Of Grammatology* 49–50). The present, as old as in Platonic philosophy, has long been defined as what is identical to itself instead of a representation of itself and thus becomes the measure of all values. It is not surprising then that Western philosophy, dominated by this frame of reference, is binary and hierarchically organised as well. Encountering the virtual environment, definite presence of the physical world and self-evident presence of one's corporeality are put into question and slip into the interplay between repetitive patterns and random modifications. A system depending upon pattern and randomness introduces a more dynamic and relational epistemology. The active processes of "feedback and feedforward loops" promise a higher level of complexity and mutability with pattern more versatile than presence and randomness as well as more productive than absence ("Virtual Bodies" 69–71). While the difference between *The Metaphysical Touch* and *The Correspondence Artist* has been interpreted as a shift from the presence/absence dialectic to the pattern/randomness loop here, this paper does not intend to pigeonhole either of the two texts. Instead, it would investigate how these two email novels identify the location of subjectivity and the location of the body and how the two competing epistemologies registered, respectively, by the printed book and the information database, are intersectional rather than discrete.

Epistolary fiction, according to Janet Gurkin Altman, is a metaphor of literature *per se*, because "...its very *mise-en-abyme* of the writer-reader relationship" (212) mimics the complex dynamics caught in writing and reading. Not only does the receiver of a letter engage in an anticipatory and interpretative work, that is, not unlike a common reader, the receiver and the sender always exchange their roles in their communication. Letters reproduced in literary forms are often represented as intertexts, requiring both the interlocutors to retrace their ref-

ings and email technology *of a specific time* yet emphasising less on the diachronic dimension.

erences to other letters, people, and social contexts to make sense of their contents. Writings about letters can be a site where readers and writers wrestle with each other for their authority and thus a particular domain to contest notions of authorship and subjectivity. Email, as a new epistolary form, while maintaining a *mise-en-abyme* structure, further ventures into cyberspace where the landscapes of identities are reshaped. The compressed time of waiting and, by implication, more immediate exchange of emails allows a more frequent swapping of the roles. Just as traditional epistolary novels shed light on literature and authorship, e-pistolary illuminates the dual process of digital textualities and (post)human subjectivities.

The Metaphysical Touch depicts the use of emails and online discussion groups at their earlier stage, where one could find the competing values of materialism and idealism come into play. The relationship between the two protagonists, Emily Piper (nicknamed Pi) and JD, is from the outset based on email correspondence and is never “actualised” in the “real world.” Email, as suggested by Esther Milne’s book title, is a “technolog[y] of presence” for both characters, which is capable of projecting a sense of embodied intimacy from the other’s absence. By virtue of this complexity of presence and absence, *The Metaphysical Touch* defines a particular e-pistolary textuality and stages how the notions of authorship are negotiated online and in turn offline.

Although Pi and JD never meet in person, their lives share considerable common ground. Pi suffers the loss of all her belongings in the Oakland-Berkeley firestorm of 1991, including her ongoing PhD thesis on Kant’s idealism, all her beloved books, and the apartment she used to stay in. JD, on the other hand, is “fired” from his job and consequently loses his means of livelihood. Both of them see writing online as a therapeutic exercise. Traumatized by the fire, Pi dislikes any printed materials, thus the less tangible email becomes a permissible way to restore her connection with the external world. Her first encounter with JD is through an online literature discussion group in which JD posts a series of prolonged “Diery” (which puns on “die” and “diary”) about his plan to commit suicide and shares his daily life before carrying out his plan. Their email correspondence starts with Pi’s attempt to approach JD who responds in the name of “Hamlet.” Their conversations are, however, abruptly put to an end by JD’s unilateral decision to unplug. Unlike JD who refuses to meet Pi in person, Pi gradually feels an urge to initiate an offline relationship. Hence, she drives towards JD’s last claimed destination, the city of Los Angeles during the 1992 Rodney King riots, only to find out that he died in a crash while embroiled in a police car chase.

Given Pi's impossibility to see him in the flesh, JD becomes a purely textual being for her, arising from electronic forms of writings. His frail existence is exacerbated as the whole story is narrated from Pi's perspective, which leaves no physical trace of JD outside his "Diery" and emails. In this "virtual" condition, JD seems to incarnate the digital itself. The rapid flow of data through digital information systems leads to the unprecedented compression and reconfiguration of time and space so that "the time taken for a message to traverse [the] distance reduces to a period experienced by the receiver, and the sender as negligible" (Stratton 254). As a result, cyberspace is often considered to nurture a disembodied presence and an immediate experience. In their early correspondence, Pi is particularly interested in "how absence of body can sometimes have no effect on the presence of a person in someone's life" (256). This presence, for Pi, is not his physical existence, but is an effect constituted by double processes of dematerialisation: the invisibility of his bodily presence and obscuring of material communication medium.

Pi forms a dynamic relationship with the email. At first, she appreciates the lightness and intangibility of email—the message sent will disappear rather than fixate on papers (124). The email for her is something in-between, "neither voice nor paper, neither pure mind nor pure matter" (Ibid.). This quality comforts Pi who is also in an intermediate status. To highlight her ghostly presence, when Pi first writes to JD, she claims to be the ghost of one of JD's dogs crushed to death by a car (199). Afterwards, when JD is stalked offline by a fanatic reader of "Diery," her attitude grows ambivalent, worrying about the degree of public access and induced unsafety in the cyberspace, despite her own optimism about its capacity to establish intimate and personal relationships. With her gradually recovering from her apprehension about materiality, her desire to "press the flesh" (276)—not the keyboard—grows stronger. She signs her last email to JD with her real name, Pi. She no longer remains satisfied with her virtual persona but needs her physical presence to be recognised by her correspondent. But the email gets rejected by JD's mailbox whose service has been stopped. The email ruthlessly bounces back to her, confirming her growing mistrust of immaterial presence. Pi's adherence to the distinction between words on page and words on screen remains unchanged. The physicality of paper or book guarantees the materiality of printed texts as well as the present body behind the text; whereas words on screen only produce an imaginary presence which will ultimately slip into absence. Recognising digital words' inability to transfer messages constituting affective and bodily content, Pi finally overcomes her graphophobia, restores her conviction in print and, by implication, her

belief in life's material substance. In the end, she returns to Berkeley Hills and fills her room with books again.

For Pi, the opposition between paper and screen is equal to the dichotomy between the material and the ideational. Setting Pi as a philosophy student working on idealism at Berkeley, *The Metaphysical Touch* navigates its reader to read it as a criticism of idealist philosophy by revisiting the imagination of presence in epistolary mode. In traditional epistolary discourse, an ideal model of communication is one that exists outside "a medium, context or vehicle" to evoke the idea of immediacy and intimacy (Milne 12). The immateriality of the medium conditions a spontaneous correspondence, while moments of dysfunction always betray material limitations thwarting genuine communication. This desire to eclipse the medium seems to come true with the coming of cyberspace which is feasible to facilitate "a flowing stream from mind to mind" (Carey 203). Critical of traditional epistolary ethics that privilege spirituality over corporeality and immateriality over materiality, *The Metaphysical Touch* relocates one's self-identity in one's body and material life, in lieu of "virtual" cyberspace. In this gesture, *The Metaphysical Touch* reworks these binaries by inversion, valorising materialism over idealism and bodily-being over virtual presence. The risk of this representation is that we can only choose between two polarities and in what follows we are still trapped within the same opposition we rebut. After his death, Pi logs onto JD's account in the discussion group and composes "The Last Installment" of the "Diery" in its author's voice. Performing as JD's ghost, Pi recounts JD's last moment before the lethal car accident and transcribes a piece of JD's diary in the postscript written on paper when he was nineteen years old. The diary records an adolescent experience about the instinct to live which overcomes his juvenile wish to exit the world, stopping him from drowning himself. In her "ghost-writing," Pi only reveals her existence once, saying that this person who is channelling JD's words wants to "make sure this got into print" (386).

Paradoxically, what she does is against JD's "will" in his last posted "Diery." JD writes that he values "the ambiguous in narrative" and therefore leaves his "Diery" without a definite conclusion (357). Yet Pi overwrites JD's last post regardless of his wish to convey her conviction in print and belief in life's materiality. The possessive frame of paper is a concrete location for one's coherent identity: instead of the JD online, she wants to retain singular access to "that person in print" to whom she feels attracted (313). At an earlier point, Pi demonstrates a distaste for the "universal access" offered by the Internet: "She didn't want anyone else reading [JD's 'Diery']". She wanted JD to herself" (189). Through posting "The Last Installment" in the

name of JD, Pi denies other people's access to him and thereby claims her exclusive ownership. She not only hijacks his online account, but also becomes the executor of his property including his books. In this sense, JD's identity is encoded as his property which can be appropriated, transferred, and above all, be perceived as a coherent entity to be possessed.

Underlying this claim is the model of "possessive individualism" that defines the self as a self-owned property. This understanding constructs one as autonomous, coherent, and identical with oneself raising from a set origin and as fundamentally distinct from others. Abercrombie et al. recognise this claim to self-ownership as "a form of authorization" that we are entitled to be "the author and topic" of our own story (33). The self-possessive individual as the authority of one's biography resembles a concept of the author in the traditional sense of the term as the origin of meaning of his or her works. In a similar fashion, to acquire possession of JD's identity is to become the author of his work for Pi, and subsequently the author of him.

Quoting JD's diary within her "Diery," Pi inevitably enacts the violence inherent in the quotation. In her discussion of Derrida's works of remembrance to his friends, Jane Gallop maintains that the act of quoting the words of a departed friend necessarily involves violent truncation, because "[e]ven if we do not interfere, interrupt, or comment, we still decide where the quotation begins and ends" (78). The violence of quotation is quite indecent but inevitable, otherwise one would either abandon the friend by isolating him within his own words or let the friend disappear through substituting his voice with that of oneself. What Pi does is a reversal. By typing "THE END" (389) to conclude both her citing of JD's diary and her own writing, she finishes "The Last Installment" with a definite, irreversible conclusion which consequently freezes, frames, and fixes JD's "Diery" and his exit from the world. She denies the universal access he provides to people and enfold his presence within the frame of paper—an institution of stability and possessive identity. Moreover, *The Metaphysical Touch* is also the title of the fictive book JD suggested that Pi (nicknamed Sylvia Plath) could write on how human relations are reconfigured through electronic lines (311). To think of *The Metaphysical Touch* as the outcome of "getting into print" is to think of Pi/Sylvia ("Plath" or Brownrigg) as the author of the novel who, by signing her name on it, becomes "the author" of JD's "story."

There are two epistolary forms that Pi includes, namely JD's autobiographical "Diery"/diary and the emails among them. Traditionally, diaries vary from letters since the former evokes "an intensity of

privacy, cloistering, isolation” (Abbott 11), whereas the letter, with its nature of exchange, signifies openness, incompleteness, and interaction of a dialogue. Online “Diery” invalidates this distinction through the “universal access” it grants. Nevertheless, Pi closes the boundary of these two open forms of writing by cloistering both its writer and the text. Her signature functions as the source and proof of authorship and authority, which proportionately suppresses other writings enveloped within it, contributing to JD’s disappearance instead of a possible co-emerging identity. Through posting “The Last Installment,” Pi also puts the common territory of epistolary imagination, originally shared by JD and her, under her (copy)right. Marilyn Schuster interprets Pi’s writing JD’s final blog as revenge for his refusal to meet her in his last letter. The act of appropriation is “...an ironic twist on the epistolary tradition in which so many men write letters in the voices of women” (Schuster 34–35). Indeed, the institution of gender implicated in the ideology of authorship is a generic aspect of epistolary discourse (Kauffman 19). Yet the problem remains that even if the male author is to be displaced with the female author, it ironically confirms the dichotomy of author and text, creator and the created, owner and the owned. Brownrigg’s model of reinstating materialism and the necessity of a physical presence falls into the “metaphysics of presence” where one term is conceptualised as superior to the other in a hierarchical system of binary oppositions. By linking idealism to absence, disembodiment and mediacy, materialism to presence, and embodiment and immediacy, identities of the two correspondents are under the authoritarian language of ownership and are mutually exclusive.

The perilous dichotomy of presence and absence is illustrated by the opposition between the page and the screen, the old and the new medium. The new technology is inadequate to generate a sense of presence and authenticity compared to paper-based writing which bears a direct imprint of an author authoring oneself. For centuries, paper has “instituted the experiences of identifying with oneself” as the place of “becoming a subject in law” (Derrida, “Paper” 56). The paper page, with its regulation of format and order, its immobile and impermeable surface, is culturally assumed to be a concrete locus of an author(ial) subjectivity. In line with *The Metaphysical Touch*, one may conclude that it is not possible for digital technologies to navigate productive subjectivity different from the paper-based possessive identity. Yet it would be early to conclude that the affiliations between print and real, digital and simulated, are a descriptive fact. It is but a “cultural perception” informed by the dichotomy of material and information (Hayles, “Condition” 183). This dichotomy is underpinned by “the older and more traditional dichotomy of spirit/matter” (Ibid. 186) and can map onto the opposition between the ideational and the mate-

rial. What generates this perception and Pi's retroactive nostalgia towards the analogue (paper and telephone) is inseparable from the material condition of the Internet service at the time. Pi connects to the internet through dial-up internet access which works through the telephone network. Marked by the incompatibility between telephone lines and Internet access, an antagonistic relationship between the analogue and the digital, the material and the immaterial can be alluring. Yet, the rapid development of telecommunication signalling methods constantly renegotiates our cultural perceptions and our understanding of the self.

More than a decade after *The Metaphysical Touch*, *The Correspondence Artist* was published in 2011. The twenty-first century witnesses a sea change in the form and use of email alongside the development of telecommunications devices and the Internet. While the quality of message bears many similarities to traditional letters in terms of their style and volume in *The Metaphysical Touch*; the popularity of mobile phones such as Blackberry in *The Correspondence Artist* encourages a shift to increasing colloquialism, smaller display, and greater handiness. Accordingly, the text of an email appears to be more editable, less materially resistant, and always ready for being recycled and reused. The email becomes permeable both in our way of accessing it and editing it. Such a technological development further mobilises the possessive identity fixed within the physical presence of paper, such as the Author or possibly "the Owner."

The strong opposition between absence and presence in epistolary practice is also modified by quasi-spontaneity and prevalent accessibility of email on the phone. Presence is normality and absence is now absent. Neither absence nor presence interests Vivian, the protagonist in *The Correspondence Artist*. When she is unable to get in touch with her lover, she imagines four fictional 'paramours' to approximate to her lover whose etymology Vivian believes to be "...something approximating, and yet distinct from, love" (118). Therefore, what is highlighted is no longer immediacy, authenticity, and self-ownership— notions owing much to the metaphysics of presence, but rather concepts of multiplicity, mutability and access— qualities of an information database. *The Correspondence Artist* depicts such a metonymic multi-presence or para-presences from two perspectives. Firstly, it upsets the logic of functionality through cultivating the email's "playful dysfunctionality" which draws attention to not just the message but also to its medium. Secondly, it deconstructs the fictional concept of ownership through employing database-like narrative which underscores random access over exclusive possession. As a secret lover to an internationally acclaimed artist whose name cannot be

disclosed, Vivian creates four fictional lovers and four versions of epistolary romance all involving a same basic plot based on what is claimed to have happened. In her para-stories, Vivian develops romantic relationships with Tzipi, a 68-year-old Nobel-prize winning Israeli female novelist; Santutxo, a legendary male Basque separatist; Binh, a Swedish-Vietnamese digital artist in his early twenties; and Djeli, a Bambara griot and a rock star. Vivian divulges the story of their relationships through both real-life meetings and email correspondence—be it successful or failed. On one occasion, an email from a paramour is trapped by the automatic spam filter. Her oblivion about that their planned meeting location has been changed results in her being attacked by Tzipi’s Medusa-like ex-girlfriend on Mykonos; being kidnapped by Basque anarchists against Santutxo; masturbating in loneliness Propeller Island City Lodge—a hotel and an art installation in Berlin; being infected with dengue fever in Bamako. Each version of the story explicitly names its intertextual reference, from Greek mythology to an art project, from Stanley Kubrick’s *Spartacus* and Marx Brothers’ *Monkey Business* to William Faulkner’s *The Sound and The Fury* and its theatrical adaptation. Offering fourfold versions of one story, four paramours, and abundant intertextual references, *The Correspondence Artist* appears to be a synthesis constituted through selecting, combining, and recycling atomic data from a series of narrative database. Vivian acknowledges that “this novel was constructed out of some fairly questionable knowledge gleaned from Google, a small, arbitrary stack of library books, a few Netflix DVDs, and my bin of sent e-mails” (139). These are databases which structure and underpin her narrative, as they structure and underpin our everyday lives.

Database, as Lev Manovich indicates, has become the “cultural form” of the computer age, which “...represents the world as a list of items and...refuses to order this list” (29) Database structure reformulates the semiotic theory of syntagm and paradigm. The syntagmatic dimension of language structures a sentence through a sequential arrangement of signifiers and relates to presence since the constituent elements of an utterance physically exist. The paradigmatic dimension, on the other hand, pertains to vertical organisation of an utterance based on selection and choice of one over the other as a result of an imaginary process within writer’s and reader’s minds (Ibid. 33–34). Manovich argues that new media remodels their relationship in the sense that paradigm (database) is externalised and is “privileged over syntagm (narrative)” (Ibid.). This is because the database is an assembly of narrative units and becomes the basis of the narrative constructed through accessing the database and linking these units in a specific order. The shift from creating a narrative to selecting among

existing data makes explicit the material existence of the database. Accordingly, the word “material” is no longer appropriate, and it should be replaced by “different degrees of virtuality” instead (Ibid.).

By emphasising “degrees of virtuality,” Manovich introduces a supplementary connection between the two, which resembles the interplay of pattern and randomness. The intrusion of random noises in recognisable patterns does not necessarily invalidate the original information, but “...can cause [the system] to reorganize at a higher level of complexity” (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies” 70). When dysfunction of the email service—an important email blocked by the spam filter—takes place in *The Correspondence Artist*, while the original expectation is frustrated, adventurous experiences in a network of intertextual narrative events proliferate. Dysfunction ceases to be a nuisance as it is under “the logic of functionality” or technological solutionism which “aspires to erase uncertainty” (de Vries 20). For Emma de Vries, epistolary modes inspired by new media—what she coins “neo-epistolary” works—follow a “logic of dysfunctionality” embracing contingency as a self-reflexive practice and a productive force (17–21). Dysfunction in narrative, that is, incompatibility among four paths of narrative, does not require the reader to conclude a linear, coherent account of story. One does not have to conclude that an event is not true because it contradicts with another narrative. Multiple possibilities run parallel to each other in *The Correspondence Artist*, urging us to multiply the stories instead of harmonising them. The focus shifts from contradiction to symbiotic interactions, with the dichotomy between presence and absence disabled by our equal accessibility to those data-events. Foregrounding pattern and randomness, the database structure of *The Correspondence Artist* operates this animate logic of dysfunctionality through recontextualising single narrative data, blending contingent narrative events and finally traversing narrative frames. Enacting a database, the novel is devoid of a stable content but rather grants access to multiflorous contents. When Vivian receives an email from Djeli about him hunting down mosquitoes, she replies with a photo of a webpage displaying Chéri Samba’s painting *Lutte contre les moustiques* (79). Apart from the painting itself, we can see its exterior frames, including Mac OS X system, Firefox browser—technological appliances providing the condition for access, and the URL—direct access to the picture. The URL, seemingly dominated by the logic of dysfunctionality, was dead. Another link on the flap of cover of the novel, <http://www.thecorrespondenceartist.com/>, is still functioning. The link leads to a website about the novel, presented as Barbara Browning’s blog. Each paramour has a personal page on which Browning talks about how she comes to write these characters and offers extra information about them that is not mentioned within the con-

straints of the textual frame. Moreover, in these blogs, we are offered more hyperlinks to relevant Wikipedia pages and YouTube videos uploaded by accounts in the names of the four paramours. There is, for instance, Tzipi's interview in audio and Djeli's instrumental cover of a song. Through these YouTube pages, more links emerge. Our attention is first drawn by other videos made by these "uploaders," and then to YouTube's "Next to play" list. Ultimately, we are thrown into the enormous database of the Internet to view, search, and navigate. The fixed and cloistered structure of printed book is made proliferative and sprawling through a database of references, information, images. Hence, the book moves beyond being just an 'imitation' of database. It becomes an actual database, both online and offline.

The transmedial narrative structure of the novel also calls a halt to the authoritarian opposition between copyright and plagiarism, between ownership and appropriation. The intra-textual narrative of the novel is composed of three layers. The first layer accommodates emails written by Vivian and her paramour. In the second, Vivian narrates her epistolary romance with the four paramours. The third tier is not exhibited until the last chapter when another narrator claims to be the author of Vivian's story and states her non-correspondence with Vivian's narrative voice (168). Beyond these three layers, there is the extra-textual writer, Barbara Browning, who puts her signature on the top of the book. The hierarchy of these four tiers of author-character relationship is nevertheless porous. Apart from the fictional paramours, Vivian also acknowledges that she fabricates some emails. For instance, there is a photograph of a split beef heart on a piece of china that she claims to be a message from Binh. Later, however, Vivian admits that she is the actual photographer and sender (167). This meta-fictional trope mobilises the boundary between the first layer (the emails) and the second (the narration), with the risk of granting Vivian author(ity). The intrusion of another narrative voice implied to be Barbara Browning removes this risk by indicating that what we are reading is not a *roman à clé* and, in turn, suspends Vivian's narration. This new narrator declares that Vivian does not correspond to her, which also leaves her own voice's coherence with Browning dubious (168). If we could not trust Vivian's narration, why should we give credit to this new first-person narrator? Above all, the presence of the "actual author," Barbara Browning, who possesses a higher level of presence, necessarily suppresses these fictional characters.

Insofar as being connected to the Internet, *The Correspondence Artist* maintains an open structure that resists anchoring Browning to an authorial position. The four paramours as characters always exceed the fixed narrative frame because they have their personal YouTube

accounts. Santutxo uploads a video in which he appears in a mask, declaring that he has never had dinner with Slavoj Žižek. This fictional character not only underscores the tenuous nature of the published novel but also disassociates himself from a public figure and hence plays with the convention which stratifies presence and absence, the creator and the created (by citing his video and putting his name in bibliography, the paper also participates in this border-crossing game). Moreover, each paramour uploads videos containing felicitating messages to Browning in the description column. In each account, there is at least one video showing Browning reading out an excerpt of her novel relevant to that paramour. By being accessed by these fictional paramours and enfolded in their published works, Browning relinquishes her authority.

The working of information and database is unveiled in competing and traversing. The claimed writer at each level of the story is soon dispossessed of authority by the words of another writer. The creator and the created—presence and absence—are shuffling their positions perpetually, fictionalising and actualising themselves all the time, moving into the more flexible interplay between pattern and randomness. Hayles attests to tremendous flexibility of language occasioned by the interaction between human and computer that “[a] signifier on one level becomes a signified on the next higher level” (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies” 77). In a similar vein, the author—and the transcendental signified of his or her work—at each level of the narrative, both online and offline, will always be interwoven into another strand of narrative. What frustrates authorial claims in every tier of the narration and renders them “flickering” is the equal and random accessibility of the reader to information in and of the novel as a database where “...every item has the same significance as any other” (Manovich 80). Readers are offered multiple coexistent versions of a story, not just pathways towards one original story. We discern the narrative through these provided materials, yet the outcome will never be an overwhelming presence, but rather selection and combination of data, replication of patterns following algorithms, and intrusion of randomness to add complexities to repetition. When all narrative elements, including the author, are informationalised into atomic narrative data, the master narrative of authorship is de-emphasised. As a result, the database structure of *The Correspondence Artist* creates ambiguity around the distinction between presence and absence. The narrative springs from a single, configured storyline to generate meaning. On the other hand, the arbitrary selection and reuse of intertextual data, their equal accessibility, and the open structure of the novel mimic the recombinant and proliferative nature of a database. Therefore, *The Correspondence Artist* does not lay stress on a fantasy of electronic media’s adequacy to

generate a sense of presence as long as it functions perfectly. When dysfunction takes place to frustrate a correspondence, the novel shows how errors can be playful and contribute to a higher level of complexity, for example, connecting adventurous forking paths of narrative to the infinite online network.

The two novels therefore demonstrate a tension between authorial control and database structure. Email communication in *The Metaphysical Touch* paradoxically urges Pi to relocate the self in analogue technologies and ultimately in the book which she considers to be empirical and thus ever-present. Her authorial imprint empowers her to overwrite the dominant patriarchal voices in epistolary tradition with a female voice, yet falls back to the metaphysics of presence, in reversion. With the development of the Internet and the popularity of digital cell phones, the analogue is transformed into binary codes in transmission, and access becomes accessible anywhere and anytime. The location of the self, accordingly, is shifted to a database which grants a higher level of mobility, flexibility, and complexity which upsets binary oppositions. The database subjectivity, therefore, shares much commonplace with, and can be more radical than, a postmodern subjectivity that privileges the *parole* of the people over the *langue* of the authority, equality in the form of data over hierarchy in terms of authenticity, open access over exclusive ownership. The posthuman subjectivity fed on digitalisation and a database structure poses a question regarding the perception of human bodies: if our subjectivities in the information society mimic and inhabit a database, is it the same case for our bodies? New media technologies acquaint us with dematerialisation and rematerialisation of the body. The constitution of the body becomes uncertain with the production of a databody that is prosthetic and even marketable as bodily parts. The databody then informs an interest in the irreducibility and immediacy of the lived body as an index and the physical locus of the self and hand as a motif that produces embodied experiences.

After the firestorm, Pi suspends all connection to her friends at Berkeley and takes shelter at Abbie's house in Mendocino. Yet, her colleague manages to send her a modem, accompanied by a handwritten message: "...HINT: the non-referential meaning of this gift is: *keep in touch*" (9). Pi cries while reading the message. Touch as an important motif in the novel is both metaphysical and physical. It connotes a symbolic sense of contact through epistolary communication and concomitantly has the physical capacity of evoking bodily reaction. *The Metaphysical Touch* deals with these two categories of touch and how the virtual presence deriving from email correspondence can or cannot foster a kind of tactile, physical bound between the sender

and the recipient. The modem indicates the potential of cyberspace to suture together the ideational and the material, to touch upon both body and mind. Pi's perception of her own body shares a similar trajectory with her understanding of the digital medium—shifting from an idealist position to a materialist one. Prior to the fire, Pi views the philosophical world as a retreat from her (female) body, because it allows her access to be purely rational as against her “pale tall body” and “the breasts and hips and thighs of it” (34). Loss of her material life in the fire further adds to the physical forms' unbearable weight and encourages her rapport with the digital which is less substantial. Instead of substitution of her mental life, the digital obtains an ambiguous status as “neither pure mind nor pure matter” (124), which connects her body to her mind. A change in Pi's body can be observed when she begins to write to JD as despite Pi's feigned indifference to her corporeality, her “body managed still to speak” (231). The virtual communication inevitably calls forth embodied investment.

It is curious how emails can form an embodied experience in the same way as traditional epistolary practices with their immateriality. While letters are always handwritten, tangible documents reminding the recipient that there is always a body behind them, email, in its digital medium, is intangible and lacks individual marks sustained by handwriting. Altman summarises two modes of presence arising from letters. The letter becomes a *metaphor* of the writer when the writer performs images of himself through the letter and the recipient conjures up images of the writer from it. The *metonymic* presence of the writer, on the other hand, is when the letter directly represents a tangible body, say, when a lover kisses the letter received as if he or she is kissing the sender (Altman 19) However, email eliminates this metonymic and material presence established throughout the letter's physicality, as Mikko Keskinen states, “the ultimate immaterial e-mail message remains untouched by both the addressor and the addressee” (386). Keskinen's analysis describes Pi's encounter with the computer screen, as all electronic epistles in *The Metaphysical Touch* are represented without direct reference to the material process of writing and detached from its external frames, to constitute a sense of immediacy and insubstantiality. However, by linking a scarcity of materiality directly to the absence of correspondents' fleshly bodies in computer-mediated communication, Keskinen overlooks tactility arising from vision and the materiality of email. Email, in its digital medium, obtains corporeality and tactility through establishing a flow between the optical and the physical. Both Pi and JD recognise the need to include idioms of the visual to describe letters on screen:

You can tell me more about your bibliophobia, too, if you want. I'm all ears. A phrase that seems inaccurate in this context; I guess I should say I'm all eyes. (219)

I don't want to pry, but I want you to know that this particular correspondent of yours is all eyes... (250)

Listen. (With your eyes, I mean. Listen with your eyes.) (289)

Instead of a “[hiatus] between visuality and intangibility,” which assumes the immateriality of email, these “body words” and emphasis on visuality act as a reminder of the physical dimension in correspondence (Keskinen 390). Repeated references to human organs, though largely metaphorically, also allude to the corporeal existence of the two correspondents. Moreover, all these “eye contacts” ensue highly emotionally charged writings concerning confessionary statements or traumatic memory. Eyes, in this sense, are an organ of touch. It is through visually drawn connectivity that Pi and JD start “[g]etting in touch” (147)—the title of Pi’s post on the discussion group to ask the way to approach JD—and grow a virtual rapport with each other. In this light, email is capable of being touched and touching upon the correspondents’ bodies in its own visual way.

Email, visually displayed on screen as a “text-as-image” against “materially resistant text” with its interactive nature is able to carve a haptic visuality between the screen and the reader and between the sender and the recipient (Hayles, “Virtual Bodies” 71). I would like to borrow Laura U. Marks’s depiction of an embodied and inter-subjective spectatorship in cinematic experience to describe a similar economy of looking in Pi’s online correspondence where human “tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions” (2) are drawn together, which enables an embodied perception where the viewer becomes the surface of herself and responds to “...the video as to another body and to the screen as another skin” (4).³ This reciprocal touch allows one to sense the physicality of the object as well as the embodiment of oneself. Pi, who feels that “[t]he hopes of her body had burned right out of her” (86), re-embodies herself through the tactile quality of JD’s email: when Pi receives the first email from JD, “her pale face pinken and her blue eyes grow genuinely bigger” (230) as if she is brought back to life from her ghostly status. The email correspondence to JD brings forth her gradual revitalisation, that is, recovery of her contact with the physical world. This explains why Pi’s emails with JD are

³While Marks mainly engages with filmic images, email bears a resemblance to haptic images in terms of their interactive nature and immersive visual experience.

often accompanied by bodily intimacy between her and Abbie. In Abbie's earlier attempts to toy with Pi, the incoming email always interrupts their affinity. Beeping notifications from the computer excite Pi more than the caress of Abbie's hand (Ibid.). However, when seeing her own email bouncing back (313), Pi encounters the disembodied nature of cyberspace and of "the metaphysical touch" whose haptic visuality is unable to reunite the body and the mind, and one body with another. The physicality of email and the possibility for it to re-embody Pi spring from a kind of indexical bound between the sender and the recipient. Curious about the noticing sound, Abbie asks, "What? What is it?" Pi answers, "It's Hamlet" (230). The email is not just from Hamlet (JD) but also Hamlet himself. This metaphoric and indexical relation assumed by Pi is critical for the haptic quality of their correspondence and JD's presence. Therefore, coming across the abrupt breakdown of this indexical connection with JD, she soon enters into an intimate relationship with Abbie.

Their bodies drawing closer together and a person's legs (Pi's) wrapped around the waist of the other (Abbie), pulling that nice waist closer and warmer while the kiss kissed and the mouths opened and a hand moved through another's hair (Abbie's) and another hand touched lightly a knotted shoulder (Pi's) and someone uttered something like a moan. (322)

The physical touch draws two bodies together. Intimacy and congruity are established through a shared physical existence—a body shared by all human beings with "legs," "waist," "hair," and "shoulder." Moreover, the elision of boundaries between bodies can be witnessed when the possessive expressions highlighting the body's singularity and referentiality finally dissolve into an infinite pronoun, "someone." The two modes of touch, therefore, are inherently stratified depending on whether one can physically approach the actual object. While the metaphysical touch functions to re-materialise Pi's body, aiding her return to the embodied reality offline, what restores her fully equipped body to rejoin the life in Berkeley is physical touch with Abbie. In this gesture, *The Metaphysical Touch* not only subverts the "man as emancipation of woman" in traditional epistolary writings but also enacts a criticism on the "body-loathing" tendency among many writers of cyberspace in which the loathed body is always attached to women. Vicky Kirby argues that regarding cyberspace as inherently immaterial and a possibility of liberating human from its inert, carnal form is substantially sexual diacritics in which human mind is a function of masculine control that produces and prolongs culture, "...separating itself from a body feminized as its natural, dumb support" (137). The binaries explain why some people refuse to include the topic of "nature"

and thus of “the feminine” within the discussion of this newly generated identity through cyberspace and why the corporeal is considered “...that residual ‘something’ that technology is articulated against” (Ibid.). A purely virtual being as he is, JD finally refuses to meet Pi offline and turns down her affective remarks by stating in his last email and last “Diery” that their friendship through correspondence is just “sweet meeting of minds” (312), rather than a carnal, romantic relationship (356). On the contrary, Pi demonstrates how the necessity of human bodily contact always disturbs the patriarchal illusion of self-sufficient identity on cyberspace. Recollecting her self-identity, she gradually generates a sense of the presence of her body, not just her mind. Her triumph is reflected in the sheer fact of survival as opposed to JD’s death, actualised in her authorship which enfolds JD within her narrative.

The novel denounces the masculine metaphysical touch in cyberspace through showing its impotence of forming real intimacy and its lack of indexicality. The physical touch of hands and material connection to the external world is more fundamental to one’s identity formation. However, the materialist stance gained by Pi relocates the feminine in the domain of nature as against that of technology symbolised by JD. Pi ultimately aligns with the corporeal, the affective, the analogue, and the actual objectifying rather than mobilising the opposition between nature and technology, feminine and masculine. Pursuers and performers of physical touch are always women, either Pi, Abbie, or JD’s former colleague Gloria whose touching hand makes JD sense attraction, which upsets him because it intervenes in their purely cerebral communication (90–91). The capacity of physical touch to generate fusion and confusion that disrupt a self-possessive identity only takes place exclusively between women. It confirms the indexical traces of presence of the body and further constitutes embodied knowledge and affective experience which secure Pi’s identity appropriated from JD. The body Pi occupies in the end is an essentially gendered body, whose capacity to touch is inextricable from her femininity. Corporeality is further made into the synonym for what is given and immutable, since nature is identified to be a primitive and empirical state prior to the complex process introduced by culture and technology. With her body conceptualised as the physical locus of her femininity, the mode of touch therefore serves to delineate and fixate the border among bodies, between the Self and the Other, the female subject and the male object, rather than traversing it. Skin, in *The Metaphysical Touch*, serves as the surface and the boundary of an exclusive feminine body, just as the paper page is the impermeable boundary of the self. There is likewise a coherence between the identities and the body in *The Correspondence Artist*. Through metonymic

multi-presence of the paramour, we witness the database-like, assembled subjectivity in and of the text, whose boundaries are never settled by granting access to the other, rather than a self-possessive entity. However, the notion of access becomes ambivalent when applied to the body, as it obscures the self-evidence of the corporeal, rendering it fragmented and digitised. What does it mean to have access to our body? Who has access to our body? Since ownership can be “...an assertion of self-possession and self-control, of a fundamental right to exclude others from one’s very being” (Phillips 20), that is, a claim to sovereign, self-protection against other invasive property claims, how do we live with the lacuna that this dissolution of sovereignty exposes?

The prominent consequence of viewing the body as information and thus as accessible as data is that the materiality and indexicality of body is lost, as in the case of JD as a purely textual and virtual being, framed by the permanent loss of his body by his death. However, as discussed above, this view is based on a dichotomy of body and mind, materiality and information, women and men. These old binaries map into the new territory of cyberspace in which the identity of women is located in the domain of body and nature, just as the identity of men inhabits the transcendental realm associated with mind and culture. The traditionally assumed connection between the biological and the essential must be rethought to stop treating the body as “the unmoveable and immobilizing substance” in order to renegotiate this sexual diacritic (Kirby 70). The tyrannical notions of presence and ownership are suspended and shift to the more flexible notion of access in a digital environment and through interaction with the machine. New vocabularies such as database and access nurture a way of recognising the body as malleable and performative, rather than inertial and essential. In this light, the database-like narrative and identity in *The Correspondence Artist* probes what the body, abstracted by textuality and virtualised by digital technology, speaks. It tackles this opposition between the indexical and the discursive/the digital through practising a performative way of writing. Della Pollock describes performative writing as a practice that bridges the constructed separation of language and experience, not through re-establishing referentiality, but through performance centred in the body. It recovers the corporeal and material dimension inherent in the notion of performance to challenge “...an easy identification of performativity with writing and the subsequent absorption of performance into textuality as performativity” (Pollock 74). The notions of database and access participate in this performative practice through mobilising the distinction between language and the body in virtual performance.

Writing in and of *The Correspondence Artist* is material and performative in the sense that the self-constitutiveness of language is dissolved by emails embedded with an awareness of writing as performance—a performative as well as a material practice. We all seem to be performers when confronting shifting life situations and perform multiple roles in various writings serving different ends. With this connection between social and linguistic performance, Meredith Love highlights the possibility of developing “...discoursal selves that displace the construct of ‘authentic writer’” (16). For example, in emails, memos, papers, and shopping lists composed by one person, it is possible to witness diversely self-performed characters, rather than an integral and coherent author. The performative way of writing thus is organised by a metonymic structure which underscores the difference rather than the indexicality between the linguistic sign and the referent. This difference testifies and dramatises the limit of language, from which the body always emerge. In her discussion of interaction between human and screen, Hayles evokes the concept of proprioceptive coherence to describe how a mature computer user can experience the keyboard as “an extension of her arm” and the screen as “a space into which her subjectivity can flow” (“Condition” 198). With the popularity of mobile phones, the bodily boundary between human and machine is further blurred as the keyboard and the screen become less divisible, as in the case of BlackBerry, or the keyboard even virtualised and displayed on the screen. It is more likely for mobile phone users to look at the keyboard and the screen at the same time, while it is impossible to do so when using a computer, be it desktop or laptop. Therefore, experienced mobile phone users are less likely to confront the dysfunctional moment, for instance, when in order to adjust the typed content, they need to find certain keys on keyboard or move their hand to use mouse or trackpad. For Vivian, her main medium for sending and receiving emails is her BlackBerry. Its high portability and easy practicability make it less an appliance outside her body, but more a prosthetic constituent. The shift from the computer to the mobile phone as the main medium for email writing, and thus to a higher level of mobility and interaction, can be seen in Vivian’s choice to send a photograph of the online digital copy of Chéri Samba’s painting on phone. When it is possible to send the URL link or only the picture to the paramour via email directly on the computer, Vivian chooses to take a photo of it and email it with her BlackBerry (79). For Vivian, her BlackBerry is not only an extension of her hands which compose the email but also embodies her eyes which view the painting displayed on computer screen and even obtains a retentive function as the brain, archiving what she sees in a “memory stick.” For its recipient Djeli, the email on screen can serve as a proxy for eyes to look at the scene that Vivian witnesses when taking the photo and subsequently

allows the recipient to occupy the same position as she does. The manual quality can be seen in the photograph's being partial—the browser is not shot fully with its right part missing—and in its slight perspective distortion, both contributing to Vivian's embodiment.

This mechanism of embodiment defies the indexical relation between the original, physical event and the photographic representation, between the sender and the email. After the mosquito message Vivian writes that belief in “the singular reality of any given message” is an illusion and that there is great indeterminacy in terms of the identity of the sender (Vivian, narrator as author, or Browning?), the recipient (Djeli, the paramour, or we readers?) and the content of email (81–82). She employs a “deceptive use of photograph” (167) to eclipse referentiality of language and to dissolve indexicality of photograph. There are some photos described by Vivian yet unpublished in the book. In an email, she writes, “pure or impure?...One I grew and one I bought” and appends a shot of lovely pansies she grows on the balcony and a “dirty” iris she buys (104). Vivian intertextually refers to this message in some following emails: one email contains a shot of her labia (105) and another of “two pure flowers”—a picture of morning glory from her balcony, and another of her nipple (155). The absence of these photographs, that is their sheer presence in language, seems to hollow out actuality of the object, because the discursive condition at large is always a symbolic form on a different plane from its referent. Moreover, language is slippery in these differential patterns. Those following emails obfuscate the “original” meaning of Vivian's words—“One I grew and one I bought,” and the “original” object of these photographs. This disruption of linearity and originality allows each email, even each word, to unwrite itself, through removing the identity between the linguistic or photographic representations and their referents.

The search for the indexicality of the photographs present is often upset as well. Earlier in the novel, Vivian claims that Binh sent her a shot of a split beef heart on a piece of china, “Duong Van Binh's Heart on a Plate.” However, she admits that she is the actual photographer, and is showing us the uncropped version in which her hand is holding the other half of the heart above the plate (167). The unveiling of such outer frame frustrates “the identification with unitary system of meaning” (Pollock 83) and at the same time destabilises the fixity of the two frames by exposing deceptive digital retouching. Neither the object of the photograph nor its subject can be assigned with one coherent and stable meaning. Rather, they can be identified with at least two symbiotic meanings. As a result, these emails and photos play off the “singular reality” of any email, and further the self-constitutiveness

of any system of representation. Yet the dissolution of an essential ground does not necessarily lead to diminishing corporeality. The body is *sensed* when we encounter the photograph with a proffering hand and a carved-up heart. Vivian (or the author-narrator) states, “That’s my hand, of course.... I, not Binh, was the one to proffer my heart on a plate. Interpret that as you will” (167). The intersection of image and text engages the reader in material sensation and tactile perception. The photograph locates the reader in the act of taking the photo. Her hands—one handling her heart, another taking the shot—touch upon the readers by allowing them to perform viewing, photographing, and retouching. We are thereby caught in a trinity of the optical, the haptic, and the digital engaging in the embodied experience offered by this encounter with her hand which is beheld and beholds, and is able to manipulate and remove indices. Besides, directly addressed in words, the reader is also turned into the offeree of her heart and thus interwoven into a bodily and affective domain. The mechanism of address, for Judith Butler, is always already reciprocal, where both bodies of addresser and addressee come into play. On the one hand, with the addresser “comporting her or his body toward the other” (2), the body of the addressee is exposed as vulnerable to such address; on the other hand, the being of the addresser is dependent on the address of the Other, always in the position of being addressed and being responded to. The image with part of the heart on the plate and the other part on her hand inevitably brings forth an offer that unequivocally demands a response—“Interpret that as you will.” The openness of her heart, together with the openness left for interpretation invites overall accessing, that is, a traversal touch. This is the point when the readers *sense* an embodied Barbara Browning ef(face)d within the photograph. Most photos are her body parts—her eye, her hand, her “heart,” which are substantially organs of touch. The eye embodies the reader with its non-indexically haptic visuality. The hand touches and experiences the touch. The heart can be touched emotionally. In this gesture, the book of *The Correspondence Artist* becomes an assembled and fluid body of Browning herself. This embodiment of Browning is not essential and indexical to an immutable and inert body, not only because it is prosthetic, but also because it is always in “the ongoing process of (self-)production” through granting and inviting access (Pollock 87). There are certain photographic objects which are not self-portraits of Browning, including two shots of Vivian’s son, Sandro, one of his nipples which are claimed to be Binh’s in the earlier passage (69) and the other of him kissing his girlfriend with two policemen behind them (159). Vivian employs the expression of conception to describe her relation to Sandro, because “it makes a child seem like a parent’s IDEA” (123). She has a fascinating formula of her “IDEA”:

... I don't remember where who thought that semen could last many years in a woman's body, so paternity could be attributed to a lover from her distant past. I find this interesting because sometimes I see in Sandro qualities of different people from my past, and it seems almost like all that semen mixed together. I like this idea.

But Sandro's theory is that he was very lucky to be 'fathered' by my 'lesbian friends' and by a 'crazy Mexican' (Raul). (124)

Capitalising "IDEA," Vivian parodies the biological claim that a child inherits parents' DNA, playing off the boundaries between culture and nature. Her biological strand, though already a hybrid concept, intermingles with Sandro's "theory of cultural influence," together giving birth to Sandro who turns out to be an amalgamation of individual information units from Vivian's romantic history, genes as biological data, and cultural cultivation. Moreover, Vivian who *conceives* Sandro is endowed with the capacity of accessing her own past to conceive a new and assembled IDEA, promising a "coperformance" of the ideational and the material, of the mind and the body (Pollock 81). Is not *The Correspondence Artist* also a conception of Barbara Browning, a synthesis of her bodily performance and intertextual references as her reading history? Writing becomes a dual process of the embodiment of the reader and the author. What emerges is not an "I" and a "you," but rather "me, not me, and not not me" (Love 25) which repudiates seamless identification with a unitary body and introduces bodily patterns of differing randomness. The book of *The Correspondence Artist* is the body in which wording is the same process as worlding.

Since identities and bodies are slippery and metonymic, they cannot be ultimately ascribed to either Vivian or Browning. An interactive network is formed among Vivian, the paramours, the author-narrator, Browning, and readers, through gestures of touch which open up enclosed frames of different symbolic planes and enable border-crossing in every aspect. To write performatively, therefore, is to access, to invite interaction, and then to write body in co-emergence. When the deployment of property claims returns to an essential body which values disconnection with others as the source of empowerment and self-control, the body written performatively is no longer a domain which the self occupies, whose integrity is exclusively secured by fixed borders, but rather inhabits and mimics an accretive and prosthetic database which never ceases to unwrite and rewrite itself.

From *The Metaphysical Touch* to *The Correspondence Artist*, the location of identity and the body surpasses the possessive frames of paper and moves into an open, accessible database. Through reading these two e-pistolary novels, this paper traces thematic, formal, and cultural transformations fostered by electronic writings and argues for the necessity of introducing new vocabularies not only for encapsulating newly generated subjectivities and bodies, but also to lessen the inertial force from the old discursive framework under the influence of the metaphysics of presence. However, this paper does not intend to establish a strict opposition between the old and the new, neither to fetishise the model of database, because contemporary electronic writing fundamentally involves interaction between the two strands of perception and practice.

The advantage of using database structure as an epistemological model over territorial language is that by inhabiting a database we are involved in a relational network of writers (or programmers), readers, and intelligent machines beyond a humanist scope. While it grants access and thus higher mutability to the identity and the body, it also uncovers the limitations that restrict our movement by embroiling individual but contextualised elements equally through mapping our relationship with others and our environments. Fed on endless movement within the database tethered to an interactive context, writing exceeds the possessive frame of paper and the body is no longer an object waiting to be signified, but constantly performing, writing, and articulating itself.



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Identity and Difference: Understanding Subjectivity through Wittgenstein's Family Resemblances

Paul Martorelli

This paper examines how the traditional subject of identity politics might be reimagined to enable less regulated subjects capable of politically mobilizing on their own behalf. It reads the oral arguments in the 2013 Supreme Court case *Hollingsworth v. Perry* as a text that relies on and produces the modern liberal subject, challenging an amendment to the California state constitution that defined marriage as being only between one man and one woman. This text showcases how a key feature of the modern liberal subject is the unitary identity it possesses. A unitary identity is one that constitutes all members of a given identity through a shared characteristic or set of characteristics, regardless of their other identities, social positions, or contexts.¹ The problems created by a subject in possession of unitary identities (e.g. Black, queer, woman) are well documented by critical race, queer, and feminist theorists among others. Central to this paper's analysis thus are the injurious exclusions that occur when membership is determined in advance as in the last instance. This paper offers a new way of constituting the subject capable of reducing or ameliorating these injuries. It develops Wittgenstein's "family resemblances" into an account of heterogeneous subjectivity capable of resisting the impulse to fix a particular definition of membership as definitive. This account not only pluralizes the subject but also produces subjects capable of sustaining the difficult work required to keep membership flexible during political mobilization.

To begin, *Hollingsworth v. Perry* is an exemplar to study how the subject is understood in contemporary American identity politics. This case concerned Proposition 8 which was a proposed amendment to the California state constitution and was ratified by statewide referendum in 2008. This amendment defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman. In March 2013, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the amendment's constitutionality in the case *Hollingsworth v. Perry* (570 U.S. [2013], 1–2). Arguing before the Supreme Court, Theodore Olson claims that "[Proposition 8] walls-off

¹In *Hollingsworth*, for example, it was argued that homosexuals were injuriously excluded from marriage *because* of their homosexual identity. This argument assumes that we are able to identify homosexual identity as it appears across a variety of races, genders, and sexual practices. Otherwise, it would be impossible to tell if their exclusion was based on their shared sexual identity or on something else.

gays and lesbians from ‘marriage,’ the most important relation in life...thus stigmatizing a class of Californians based upon their status and labeling their most cherished relationships as second-rate, different, unequal, and not okay” (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 28). Although civil unions may grant gays and lesbians access to the civil-political benefits of marriage, denying them access to the institution itself, not just its benefits, continues to treat gays and lesbians unequally based on their status, their identity. Separate but equal civil unions mark homosexuals as equal citizens and give them access to equal rights. But civil unions continue to deny homosexuals what Olson calls the “very, very critical” label of “marriage” (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 45). As the label of ‘marriage’ confers a value and privilege of its own, Olson argues, same-sex couples are injured even when they have access to the legal benefits of marriage without the label. Denying gays and lesbians access to ‘marriage’ relegates them as inferior to their heterosexual counterparts, and stigmatizes their existence as a homosexual (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 45). Proposition 8 institutionalizes some individuals as less valuable, worthy, or dignified than others, as well as some citizens as second-class.

By examining this argument, one can see that the homosexual subject is conceived of as a unitary phenomenon in marriage equality discourse. The subject is unitary because the injured parties petitioning in the court are constituted by their homosexual identity. Olson points out that in American jurisprudence homosexuals are “defined by their status” (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 40). They constitute a class based on this status (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 47). But, what does “status” mean in this legal argument? What does invoking “status” as a basis for injury reveal about the subject with unitary identities? Framing the legal question Olson asks, “whether or not California can take a class of individuals based upon their characteristics, their distinguishing characteristics, [and] remove from them the right of privacy, liberty, association, spirituality, and identity that--that marriage gives them” (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 42). If homosexuals form a “class based on status” and California wants to remove rights from a “...class of individuals based upon their characteristics, their distinguishing characteristics,” then the syntax of Olson’s argument suggests “status” as a set of distinguishing characteristics that determines membership in a group. In *Hollingsworth*, homosexuals form a group that is defined by their unique characteristics. Being a part of this group means to have certain distinguishing characteristics—what Olson means when he says homosexuals are “defined by their status.” Janet Halley explains that only a “...personal [characteristic] that inheres so deeply within a person that it constitutes a pervasive personal essence” qualifies as a

relevant characteristic for defining status (*Don't 30*). Individuals with characteristics so central to their personhood that they cannot exist as persons without them are said to be defined by status. In other words, "...status is constituted in and as a secret inner core of personhood" (Halley, *Don't 30*). Roughly, status connotes identity in the American legal system.² These arguments collectively show that homosexuals are constituted as a group (a class) based on a shared identity (a status). Belonging to the group means being defined by the status "homosexual," that is, having homosexual identity. To discuss the nature of the subject with (homosexual) identity, this paper focuses on one feature that emerges from Olson's argument: the unitary nature of homosexual identity and the subject constituted by this identity (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 1–23; Nicholson; Reagon; Spelman).

In the case of marriage equality, the relevant subject has a homosexual identity. But every "man," "woman," or "heterosexual" are other subjects too with their own plural identities. What distinguishes a subject with a particular identity (homosexual, woman, etc.) is some group of possible characteristics including, potentially, particular body parts, actions, desires, knowledge(s), compartments, behaviors, beliefs, evaluations, aptitudes, and attitudes (Appiah 65–66, 69–70; Fuss 2-3, 13–14; Hacking). One is a homosexual subject with particular identity because of the particular elements that distinguish "homosexual" as a kind of person within a specific historical and social context.

Considering the different identities of a subject, Olson identifies a characteristic that distinguishes a gay or lesbian person regardless of their other identities, social positions, or life styles. Without this characteristic he and the Court will not know who is a member of the class based on status that is injured by exclusion from marriage. That is, they will not know who is and is not a homosexual. Such ambiguity would leave the law unable to know who is excluded from marriage *because* they are homosexual and who is excluded for other reasons, such as having more than one partner. Consequently, they would not know who is *injured* because of this identity-based exclusion and who is rightly excluded for violating the terms of the marriage contract. Olson and the Court settle on "same-sex desire" as the homosexual's distinguishing characteristic.

²For a line of jurisprudential reasoning that deploy the legal term "status" in a way that lay persons would understand as synonymous with "identity" see *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1986); *Lawrence v. Texas*, U.S. 558 (2003); *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 576 (2015).

In *Hollingsworth*, the subject is understood to be unitary because of their common homosexual identity. Within a unitary model of subjectivity, Elizabeth Spelman explains that "...each part of [one's] identity is separable from every other part, and the significance of each part is unaffected by the other parts...my being a woman means the same whether I am White or Black, rich or poor" (136). In Spelman's example, unitary subjectivity is the sum a particular race (White or Black), gender (man or woman), and class (rich or poor). "Unitary" in this case means "made up of discrete units." But since each part of the self is distinct from every other part, one can identify what makes a person "a woman," regardless of race and class. Following "a more general principle of investigation in the social (and natural) sciences: If you want to see what difference any particular difference makes to a situation, be sure to cancel out the effects of other possible differences in such a situation." The distinguishing characteristics of "woman" is what's left over when you remove other factors, such as race and class, from consideration (Spelman 103). "Unitary" in this case means "singularly defined" or "homogenous."

It is this second sense of unitary subjectivity that this paper analyzes in *Hollingsworth*. It is on the basis of this common status that homosexuals are discriminated against. All people who have same-sex desire, all people who share Kristen Perry's status (homosexual), are prohibited from exercising the fundamental right to marriage because of their status (*Hollingsworth v. Perry* 47). To put it differently, it is because one has same-sex desire that one is prohibited from marrying, regardless of whether one is Black or White, female or male, rich or poor (Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing" 150–51).

Olson posits, and all present at the oral arguments accepted, "same-sex desire" as the constitutive characteristic of the homosexual subject regardless of their other identities or life styles. But, the obvious question presents itself: Why is "same-sex desire" posited as *the* constitutive characteristic of these subjects in the absence of any definitive or conclusive evidence to support this claim? After all, any of the following are also posited as constituting the homosexual as a kind of person (in addition to or instead of same-sex desire): a biological or physiological characteristic; gender (non)conformity (by any boy who fears being deemed a faggot); same-sex sodomy (in some of the Supreme Court's imaginings, such as *Bowers v. Hardwick*, and the fears of straight men); a propensity for same-sex acts not limited to sodomy (in the military's relentless game of hide-and-see that was "Don't Ask, Don't Tell"); cultural knowledge(s), such as camp or diva worship to name two classics; or, even an avowal or identification, based

on affect or feeling not any conscious, self-reflexively specifiable reason.

Even if “same-sex desire” is the distinguishing characteristic, which is the true or right way to define “same-sex desire”? To consider a few questions with this formulation: What defines the “sex” of one’s desire? Is sex established by genitals? Genes? Both? Something else? (Sedgwick 27–28). And which form of “same-sex desire” constitutes the homosexual? Is it erotic attraction? Romantic sentiment? Some other kind(s) or formation(s) of desire? (Butler, “Imitation” 310). The seemingly singular characteristic “same-sex desire” is plural. And it cannot be kept abstract to settle the question of which particular formulations of “same-sex desire” constitute the homosexual subject. Same-sex desire’s different meanings, formations, instantiations, or expressions cannot be reduced to a unified abstract by estimating that, “Something called ‘same-sex desire’ distinguishes the homosexual, but we need not define what is or counts as ‘same-sex desire.’” Even if we hold that subjects share “something” in common, this abstract definition ultimately requires specific content. While deciding whether or not this particular person is a homosexual one needs to know whether or not they have same-sex desire and in order to know that one must beforehand know the nature of same-sex desire which constitutes the homosexual. For example, if a man is only erotically attracted to other men this erotic attraction counts as same-sex desire, and because of this same-sex desire he is identified as a homosexual. When he asks to join the Gay Men’s Chorus, for example, whether or not others accept him as an authentic gay man will depend on whether or not “only erotic attraction” sufficiently defines “same-sex desire” for those in the group as well. If they do not recognize only same-sex erotic attraction as same-sex desire, say, because they believe desire must also come with (the possibility for) romantic-emotional investment in the other (i.e. intimacy), then he will not be recognized as a member, at least by this group (Sedgwick 22–27). The abstract formulation “something called “same-sex desire”“ defers the question of which particular characteristics constitute the homosexual without resolving it.

The problems with a unitary subject in possession of particular identities are well documented by feminist, critical-race, and queer theorists, among many others. This paper examines only one set of problems raised by this subject; specifically, the problem of defining group membership. The problem is a familiar one: if members are defined by a characteristic common to all members, how is that characteristic chosen and by whom? There are many potential ways of defining homosexual identity. What makes “same-sex desire” the right

characteristic that truly defines this status? Different members will belong in different ways and according to different norms based on their other identities, social positions, and cultural contexts. Because the world exceeds any single description we give of it, the very act of naming excludes some who belong to a given identity (Haraway 296).

Olson's claim on behalf of homosexuals is "...stipulative rather than descriptive, as much based on what [we want homosexuals] to be as on any collective survey as to how those who call themselves [homosexuals] perceive themselves" (Nicholson 63). Consequently, a unitary identity excludes some who are or could be members given a different distinguishing characteristic. This exclusion produces injuries related to misrecognition, identity erasure, and cultural hegemony (Collins; Crenshaw, "Mapping"; Hooks). It also creates state-based political consequences because it confuses a definition of membership that includes only some for one that includes all.

White, second wave, American feminism provides a useful example of the dangers that occur when a unitary subject governs a state-based political project. Consider Betty Freidan's claim that women were unjustly excluded from the workforce, from property ownership, and rights (1963). To be a woman, then, was to be excluded from the workforce. The subject "woman" was distinguished, in part, by the characteristic "excluded from the workforce." In this case, the definitive characteristic was an injury instead of an attribute or property such as biology or physiology. But this White, second wave, American feminist definition of woman overlooked the women of color and their long subsisting predicament to work. These women were never excluded from the workforce. Indeed, they often worked for other women whether as slaves in the ante-bellum South or as paid child care, maids, laundresses, or seamstresses. The characteristic that supposedly defined women regardless of their other identities really defined women in relation to their other identities. As formulated by the political project for equal employment, "woman" really meant "White, middle-class women" since it was these women who were excluded from the workforce. Distinguishing women by their exclusion from the workforce excluded women of color from this political movement by and for women.

Because feminists fighting for equal employment opportunities offered their formulation of "woman" as universal, the political project rooted in this formulation of "woman" could claim to be for the advancement of women as a group, that is, claim to secure equality for all women. But because "woman" really meant "white, middle-class woman," only these women were protected from discrimination. Al-

though businesses might have to hire women, for example, they were under no obligation to hire *Black* women as Crenshaw demonstrates (“Demarginalizing” 142). Black women did not benefit from laws prohibiting discrimination against women *because* they did not “count” as women based on the project’s definition of this identity. The definition of “woman” that allowed White women to advance their cause relied on excluding Black women (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 143).

The problem of multiple membership criteria cannot be solved by resorting to a list of possible criteria. A list would be either conjunctive (this and that), disjunctive (this or that), or serialized (any of the following). A conjunctive list only increases the pressure of unification by stipulating ever more precise membership requirements. A disjunctive list suggests those with more than one attribute are, somehow, not members. If homosexuals are defined by either “same-sex desire” or “same-sex acts,” then having both renders the person something other than a homosexual. Perhaps the list is serial, then any number of the following criteria define a homosexual but this solution only defers the problem. Who decides which characteristics make the list? What if in certain circumstances one has a characteristic on the list but in others one does not? Would one stop being a member according to the circumstances? What happens when the list begins to overlap with other identities’ distinguishing characteristics? Can one be both a homosexual and a heterosexual at once? (Butler, “Imitation” 310).

It seems that easing the injuries of the unified subject requires re-thinking the discourse of subjectivity itself instead of simply changing the requirements for membership in a particular identity. If women of color are excluded from the group because “woman” is defined as “denied employment,” then the simple solution seems to be changing the definition of “woman” to something else, like, “able to give birth.” But this change only sets off a new round of exclusions since many women are not able to give birth. It is necessary to introduce into the discursive field competing ways of being constituted as subjects with identities. Perhaps, resistance can be achieved by reconstitution of identities. Instead of only fighting over what does or does not make one a homosexual, perhaps the response needs to be saying “yes,” to other discourses of being homosexual subjects, to being constituted as a “homosexual” in other registers, according to other measures, in the name of other principles, and by means of other procedures (Foucault, “What is Critique?” 44). Resistance to injury can be enacted by setting into play alternative constitutions, measures, values, and subject formations with the aim of having them circulate, connect, attract, and propagate their own deployment to produce a counter-discourse capa-

ble of displacing, challenging, deflating, unraveling, or loosening the hold of the current injurious one (Foucault, *History* 96). If the discourse of subjectivity is not changed, if alternative models are not introduced, then the same injurious effects will continue to inflict different subjects.

In order to theorize a heterogeneous subject, this paper develops Wittgenstein's conception of "family resemblances" into a model of signification that can be used for re-thinking identity (Nicholson; Heyes). According to this model, meaning is produced "...not through the determination of some specific characteristic, or set of such, but through the elaboration of a complex network of characteristics, with different elements of this network being present in different cases" (Nicholson 60). Wittgenstein develops the idea of family resemblances by examining the many objects we call "games." He notes that when we look at various things that we call "games" we "...will not find something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships and a whole series of them at that" (Wittgenstein §66). Wittgenstein demonstrates that "game" takes on meaning *without* a distinguishing characteristic. A common characteristic does not constitute the activity or object "game" across all of its forms or in all of its permutations, yet we know what games are. What property or characteristic distinguishes Chutes and Ladders, chess, poker, solitaire, baseball, Angry Birds, and a little girl imagining she is fighting a dragon, collectively, as games? Chutes and Ladders and chess have some things in common, such as a board for play. They also have quite a few differences. Picture the size, shape, and format of their boards. If we assume what they have in common (a board of some kind) defines "game," then how are poker and solitaire games? But board games and card games are not only different from each other; there are also certain similarities between particular board and card games that define their "game-ness" (Pitkin 64). Chutes and Ladders and poker must have multiple players; solitaire and chess have no such requirement (and are similar to each other in this particular difference from Chutes and Ladders). Chess and poker are games of strategy; there is no strategy to Chutes and Ladders. Yet "strategy," as a characteristic of games, also varies. Poker in Las Vegas is constituted by strategy in a different way and of a different kind than poker among friends. And the strategy of poker is not the same as that of chess—not least of all because they each involve different pieces and moves.

Wittgenstein, hence, points out that the meaning of "game" is not determinate; it is not established by singling out a specific characteristic that distinguishes "games," regardless of their particulars, from

other activities. Even the abstract characteristics like “having players” fails to differentiate games from other activities, such as the orchestra, dating, or world politics. Wittgenstein asks: is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared (§66). Thus, the meaning of “game” emerges as and through “...a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing [*sic*]: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (Wittgenstein §66). Wittgenstein wants us to see that games are not defined by some common and “essential characteristic of game-ness,” but by their resemblances to and differences from each other in their particularity (Pitkin 64). He asks, “Isn’t my knowledge, my concept of a game, completely expressed in the explanations I could give? That is, in my describing examples of various kinds of game; shewing [*sic*] how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of these; saying that I should scarcely include this or this among game; and so on” (Wittgenstein §75). Wittgenstein characterizes these networks of partially overlapping similarities and differences that produce meaning as “family resemblances” (§67).

Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblances suggests that complex network of characteristics give meaning to a concept by generating equally complex network of overlapping and crisscrossing similarities. This paper suggests some overlapping and crisscrossing similarities between family resemblances and how the (homosexual) subject is produced, not always “coherently or consistently,” but by its intersections with gendered, “racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” within various historical contexts (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 3). Put another way, this paper offers family resemblances between Wittgenstein’s analysis of linguistic meaning and the (homosexual) subject’s production to argue for a less unified subject.

Wittgenstein points out that we cannot identify a boundary that determines the meaning of “game” because this boundary changes as we examine various instances: For how is the concept of a game bounded? Can you give the boundary? No. You can *draw* one; for none has so far been drawn. But this is not ignorance. We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn (§68–69). What makes poker a game might not make chess a game, yet both are games. Likewise, we cannot identify some specific characteristic of homosexual subjects because what constitutes this category depends on the various examples or instances of it that we examine. And these cases

of homosexual identity will depend on the particular identities, social positions, and contexts within and by which they are produced. A White, middle class, cis-gendered, male homosexual might define his “gay-ness” through his same-sex desire. But a White or Black, middle or working class, cis-gendered *lesbian*, or a White or Black, *working class*, cis-gendered male homosexual, or a White or Black, working or middle class, *trans lesbian* might have a different characteristic that is more definitive of their “gay-ness” than their same-sex desire (if they have same-sex desire at all). These other homosexuals may define their sexuality through, say, pleasures, sex acts, relations, knowledge(s), behaviors, comportment, or something else altogether. Or, if these homosexuals *do* primarily root their sexual identities in their same-sex desire, it is neither obvious nor necessary for them to experience same-sex desire in the same way as a White, middle class, cis-gendered male homosexual. That is, while all of these homosexuals might abstractly share the same characteristic, each could still have or experience this characteristic in different ways depending on their other identities and social positions. For some, their same-sex desire might be constituted by their erotic attraction to members of the same sex. Others might identify themselves as homosexual based on a same-sex desire that is more a capacity for intimate emotional attraction to persons of the same sex than an erotic longing. And yet still others might find same-sex desire in fantasies of being (with) a certain kind of man or woman or of dominating or surrendering to another, to name two other possible modalities of desire.

One could “...draw a boundary [that delineates games from other activities] for a special purpose” (Wittgenstein §69). People ask for board games for their birthdays. They draw a boundary around the concept “game” to include “has a board” for the special, specific purpose of telling others what they would like for their birthday. Likewise, we could distinguish “homosexual” by some characteristic for a specific purpose or at a particular intersection of race, class, and gender. Homosexuals could be distinguished by same-sex desire for the purpose of securing marriage rights. Or at the intersection of White, middle-class, and male they could be distinguished by being a sissy (as in the stereotype). But drawing the boundary “for a special purpose” is necessary only “to make the concept useable...for that special purpose” (Wittgenstein §69). This boundary constitutes games *only* for that purpose. What defines games for a specific purpose does not define games *per se* or for all other purposes, which might require having to draw a new boundary. And, indeed, even when a boundary is drawn for a particular purpose others might *still* say, “That is not the boundary I would draw, even for this purposes” (Wittgenstein §76).

Likewise, when Olson defines “homosexual” by “same-sex desire” for the purpose of securing marriage rights, this definition is specific to that purpose. This definition might not *and need not* define being homosexual for “...the queers who have sex in public toilets, who don’t “come out” as happily gay, the sex workers, the lesbians who are too vocal about a taste for dildos or S/M, the boys who flaunt it as pansies or as leather men, the androgynes, the trannies or transgendered...” (Warner, *Trouble* 66). Indeed, these other subjects might identify a different characteristic as more definitive of “homosexual” for the very purpose of marriage rights. And when one distinguishes “homosexual” by a particular characteristic at a conjunction of race, class, and gender, one might (and will) find people at these intersections for whom this characteristic does not define homosexual identity; who will define the stipulated characteristic differently; and even cases where this characteristic is defined differently for the same homosexual as he or she moves through different contexts.

It is clear that neither “game” nor “homosexual” collapses into incoherency without a determinate meaning. Yet, at the same time, not everything qualifies as a game, and not everyone can qualify as homosexual. The concepts have elasticity and indeterminacy, but they are not infinitely pliable. Wittgenstein discusses meaning’s continuity and flexibility by responding to an imaginary objector concerned over the indefinite nature of the concept “game.” Having demonstrated that one cannot “give the boundary” for the word “game” but can “draw one; for none has so far been drawn,” Wittgenstein continues on to say, “[the absence of a predetermined boundary that defines what a game is] never troubled you before when you used the word ‘game’” (§68). Wittgenstein’s interlocutor is troubled by the fact that meaning is not fixed. Their concern seems to be that without a predetermined boundary to circumscribe a concept, a word can mean anything at all since without these guardrails, “the use of the word is unregulated, the ‘game’ we play with it is unregulated” (Wittgenstein §68). Wittgenstein responds by agreeing that “[the meaning of the word] is not everywhere circumscribed by rules” (§68). But he rejects the implicit corollary that without “rules” (i.e. conceptual boundaries, pre-given definitions, predetermined constitutive characteristic) words can mean anything at all. As an instance, he points out that there are not “...any rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too” (Wittgenstein §68). Tennis is not “everywhere circumscribed by rules”: how high you throw the ball is up to you; how hard you hit the ball depends on circumstance not prescription; how the racket is held and manipulated is a matter of art not science. In spite of its unregulated aspects, people who play

tennis know when they're playing tennis or when they're playing basketball, and recognize tennis as a game and not a democratic process. One does not need to tightly fix the meaning of a word for it to signify; one does not need at tightly fixed meaning to prevent a word from becoming meaningless.

Hannah Pitkin explains Wittgenstein's point through a different metaphor. Although one does "...not confine words to the precise context in which they originate, or in which we first encounter them," one also does not use a "...new and different word each time we encounter a new context...for how could one "learn" the "meanings" of "words" which were used once and then discarded, like paper tissues" ? (Pitkin 62). People can relate new and unexpected instances to old and familiar ones because "concepts are projectable, but projectable in regularized ways, ways that really do make relevant connections" (Pitkin 62). This is not to say that new instances must be intelligible only in terms of the old. What shared framework of meaning allows students today to understand "woke" as a shorthand for "attuned to systemic injustice"? Because English "...is not a closed, finished system, 'everywhere circumscribed by rules'" what will count as or be a "relevant connection" cannot be presupposed or circumscribed by past cases; rather, relevant connections must be found and generated within specific historical contexts and cases (Pitkin 62).

Family resemblances highlight the complex relationship between identity and the differences in relation to which it is established. At first glance, family resemblances preserve the relation between identity and difference. Some things are games and some things are not. Some are homosexuals and some are not. Wittgenstein neither does away with the identities "game" or "homosexual" nor does he expand them to include all things and people. His point is that these identities do not have determinate meaning, that is, we cannot define them by singling out the characteristics of games *qua* game or the characteristics all homosexuals have regardless of their other identities, historical contexts, and social positions. But family resemblances emphasize the importance of difference within identity even as they confirm the distinction between identity and difference. There are three important dimensions of difference within identity: plurality, partiality, and contingency.

Family resemblances mark identity itself as internally plural, consisting of "...multifarious relationships...a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing" (Wittgenstein §66). "Same-sex desire" both does and does not constitute "homosexual" as in the case of the marrying kind and S/M practitioners. "Same-sex de-

sire” can be essential to homosexual identity (say, in the marriage equality cases before the Supreme Court) and yet, at other times, it can be irrelevant (whether someone *actually* has same-sex desire is largely irrelevant to fag-bashers). They also highlight identity’s internal difference by drawing attention to identity’s partial nature since membership criteria always exceed any particular member or the identity category’s specified content. Each homosexual is a member based on only a few of the many characteristics that constitute this identity. Some homosexuals may have same-sex erotic and emotional desire, but they might lack any of the many other characteristics that constitute homosexual identity. No one homosexual can lay claim to having this identity in its fullness, totality, or completeness. Thus, family resemblances mark the importance of difference within identity by calling attention to identity’s contingency. Who counts as a homosexual will depend on what gets included as constituting homosexual identity and for which purposes the line is drawn around these characteristics and not others

Although family resemblances change how one is a member and what it means to have an identity, this model preserves the boundary between member and non-member. The boundaries expand and shift, are partial and temporary, but boundaries continue to exist. Every homosexual might not always be homosexual because of the same characteristics throughout their life, but this plurality does not make them heterosexual. Resemblances can be projected in many ways, but not infinitely. To emphasize Wittgenstein’s metaphor, not everyone is part of a specific family.

On the other hand, family resemblance establish identity through the overlapping similarities and differences between members, which blur the lines between identity/difference, same/other, included/excluded, and member and non-member. For instance, we might find webs of similarities between those characteristics bounded by a particular version of the category “homosexual” and those making up the category “heterosexual.” For example, same-sex bodies are present in gay S/M sex and in straight prison sex and in sex on “the down low”—men who have sex with men but do not identify as “homosexual.” Lesbians desire Ruby Rose. And so do straight women as indicated, in a demeaning and disrespectful way, by the phrase “I’d go gay for her.” Indeed, the whole reason straight men frequently invoke “no homo” is that homosexual and heterosexual identity look alike sometimes. On the one hand, heterosexual and homosexual are not the same identity simply because some members resemble each other in particular ways. On the other hand, these identities are not so clearly distinct, cannot be so easily distinguished from each other, precisely because

overlapping similarities and differences can emerge between members of different identities.

The line between identity and difference is further blurred by the fact that the characteristics constituting the homosexual subject in a particular case do so because we have discursively drawn a line around them *as constitutive* and excluded all others. Any homosexual is a homosexual because the boundary has been drawn in a way that includes them. Consequently, any non-homosexual is potentially a member if the boundary is drawn differently. Family resemblances seem to generate constitutive outsides which, however, are always in flux. A family resemblances model cannot fix one set of characteristics as true for members *qua* member. It cannot cease the play or process of description, counter description, and counter counter-descriptions that occur as subjects vie for membership (Connolly 65). Its membership lines are always able to be redrawn. New resemblances are always potentially possible. Identity as family resemblances must exclude some in order for others to belong. But this formulation of identity is always open "...to the tendency of entities it would [exclude, or define as different, as other, as non-member] to counter, resist, overturn, or subvert definitions applied to them" (Connolly 64). Because membership criteria emerge from the similarities and differences among multiple, equally viable and valuable, members, no one formulation of the identity can be fixed as true and thereby disqualify all others by definition. Any instance that is fixed as the truth can be denounced for a different reality. Some might modify a response by Wittgenstein to this problem and say,

No, *this* constitutes members as well. Your definition is incomplete and partial. In fact, your definition is also contextual and contingent. At best, it only defines members for your particular purpose. Other purposes can define them otherwise. And even then, that is not how everyone must define members for purpose you specify. (§73)

Part of family resemblances' fluidity comes from being unable to specify what members are in advance or in the last instance. Membership is not restricted to or determined by a single formulation of an identity. One cannot determine eligible members through the presence, absence, or intelligibility of any particular constitutive characteristic. No particular characteristic can be required as proof of either having the identity or having the right, true, or normal version of it. The challenge is to think of identity without an overarching formulation that constitutes all members in the same way or by the same characteristic with family resemblances.

Family resemblances' emphasis on identity's internal difference and the potential for identity to include what was other marks this vision of identity as not unitary. It is not completely unitary because it is enough that members' characteristics resemble each other, look alike, or appear similar in specific or general ways, for members to share an identity. Membership is based on *similarities* among members without needing them to share some concrete, particular, explicitly or implicitly identifiable thing in common. For instance, say, one-person A's same-sex desire might look like that of another person B's, who practices same-sex S/M, in that both find same-sexed bodies erotic. But do both of them share the *same* characteristic? Does "same-sex desire" mean the same thing for both of them? Their desire might be similar in the eroticization of same-sexed bodies. But how or what they desire (of) those bodies might be different. A may eroticize the body because he desires the kind of person it signifies, expresses, or contains. It may also be for the subjectivity in the body and the body being a conduit to that internality. B may eroticize the body because he desires the body itself for the physical, psychological, or aesthetic pleasures it generates. He may desire the body without needing or understanding it to signify, contain, or lead to anything else. In the above example their same-sex desire look alike, but they are also noticeably different. And because their same-sex desire is different they cannot be said to be constituted as homosexuals by the *same* characteristic. It turns out A and B only resemble each other.

Indeed, B might not even identify his eroticization of same-sexed bodies *as* "desire" but as pleasure seeking, aesthetic taste, identification, or catharsis (to offer a few alternatives to "desire"). A might have generated a resemblance between himself and B that B might not even see. But just because A recognizes a similarity between them (same-sex desire as the eroticization of same-sexed bodies) does not mean B is or must be constituted as a homosexual by same-sex desire. B might look like A in some sense, and still be constituted as a homosexual by something else (say, the pleasure he gains from same-sex S/M, or the acts themselves when performed with same-sexed bodies (cis or trans), or the intimate emotional attachments he forms to members of the same sex—after all, practicing S/M need not be what constitutes him as a homosexual).

Family resemblance allows some members to share similarities with others while not sharing these similarities with all others since one characteristic is not common to all *qua* member. What a member can share with one, may not be shared with another member, and vice versa. Wittgenstein makes this point by describing how "in spinning a

thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres” (§67). The fiber at the start of the thread shares no overlap with the fiber at the end but both indubitably belong to the thread. Pitkin explains that “the relationship among the cases is nontransitive: case A resembles case B this way, case B resembles case C a different way, case C resembles case D in yet a third way, case E is like cases A and D, but not like B and C, and so on” (Pitkin 64).

Wittgenstein’s image of a thread pushes against the need to create an abstract or master term that will make all members intelligible *qua* member. There is no need to synthesize into or subsume under a general characteristic every particular characteristic that constitutes various members. Nor is there a need to keep an ever expanding list of constitutive characteristics. Such a list would be meaningless. If it is disjunctive, members will both belong and be excluded. If it is conjunctive, no one would ever be a member. If it is serial, it would be useless for specifying membership. Instead of looking for a characteristic that distinguishes members *qua* member, one needs to be attuned to the many potential ones. “Homosexual” might be constituted through same-sex desire, gender (non)conformity, S/M acts with same-sexed bodies, penetrative homo-sex, a preference for homo-sex, a penchant for it, or fantasies about it, depending on particular intersections of identities and social contexts (Sedgwick 24–26). Indeed, the same characteristic might be constituted differently depending on race, class, gender, and circumstance. Michael Warner illustrates this point by asking us to consider “...the intrication of genetic and erotic logics in both race and gender. Is race, is gender, a mode of desire or of reproduction? Reproduction usually implies eros; but when identity is apprehended as desire, as in same-sex or cross-race relations, its reproductive telos disappears” (“Introduction” xviii). But also think about how differently “same-sex desire” might be constituted based on whether one is at the bar, on the street, in one’s home, or at a marriage equality rally. A family resemblances model of identity is not unitary because it does not stipulate or require all members to share or be constituted by a distinguishing characteristic, conduct, or desire in order to be a member.

A model of identity akin to family resemblances disrupts, displaces, loosens, or opens up discourses that establish subjects who are secure in their identities, subjects who *are* their identities. Family resemblances point to a vision of identity that is not unitary. It produces subjects that are plural, contingent, and partial. Sometimes a homosex-

ual is defined as a homosexual because of their same-sex desire, as in the case of the arguments for marriage equality. Other times, that same homosexual might find themselves defined as a member by their knowledge of camp, such as when they're at a gay bar or a drag show. There are times when it is both of these characteristics (say, at the bar trying to pick someone up) and times when it is neither (say, in the classroom). A family resemblances model also produces a contingent subject. One "is" a homosexual in relation to their contexts, which include external circumstances but also their other identities. A plural and contingent subject is also always a partial one. One never "is" fully, completely, or totally *the* homosexual identity they have since this identity precedes and exceeds any given homosexual.

A theory of family resemblances also might produce subjects who are able and willing to suspend the belief that they are the truest, most authentic members of an identity. Current discourses of identity create subjects who can and do suspend their assurance since where there is power there is resistance (Foucault, *History* 95). But such resistance is constrained, made difficult, rendered counter-intuitive or seemingly impossible through discourses that constitute identity's "true nature" as unitary, that is, as defined by a distinguishing characteristic common to all members *qua* member. Discourses of unitary identity constitute subjects who might want to participate in less exclusionary and regulatory political action, but who face unconscious, affective, or other non-rational limits to their ability to inhabit other people's life-worlds, and so, create inclusive family resemblances capable of resisting identity's unifying force. These limits come from the political subject's own lifeworld, that is, from the background knowledge they have about "how the world really is." In this case, discourses of unitary identity always generate knowledge about the world that makes it difficult for individuals to suspend the belief that they are the truest representative of an identity because such self-assurance is natural and normal given what they know about identity's "true nature" (e.g. identity is defined by a common characteristic shared among all members *qua* member; we can identify this common trait if just "factor out" others; an identity's true or proper constitutive characteristic will and should transcend differences).

Wittgenstein with the linguistic theory of meaning provides the groundwork for developing a discourse of identity that constitutes subjects differently and that might be able to disrupt, de-center, unravel, deflate, or loosen the hold of current discourses of identity. Family resemblances produce identities that are contextual, contingent, partial, and incomplete. Consequent questions which can be raised are:

what kinds of subjects might bear such identities? How might subjects relate to identity as family resemblances? Identity is not a stable, fixed, universal, and unifying phenomenon for these subjects. Perhaps they are “used to” membership being slippery, flexible, and imprecise. They might be “comfortable” with not fully inhabiting or completely belonging to an identity category. The subjects of family resemblances, then, might be better “prepared” to engage in collective political action that does not rely so heavily on predetermined definitions of membership. For one thing, they might be less likely to rigidly believe in their particular constitution of an identity as the only or the truest version of it. If identity is not or should not be rigidly bounded or deterministic, then it is probably easier to suspend one’s assurance in the correctness of one’s perception of identity. Family resemblances in a certain way seem to discourage defensiveness about one’s particular constitution of identity; they seem to encourage an openness to the possibility of other constitutions being as valuable or valid as one’s own.

Another way in which the subjects of family resemblances might be better suited to political action that does not rely so heavily on a predetermined definition of membership is their “comfort” with the unknown as potentially related to them. Family resemblances produce meaning through the overlapping of similarities and differences between examples. But a strict correspondence or logical equation is not always going to exist. How instances of a concept, or constitution of an identity, resemble each other is not always clear through deductive, analytic, rationalistic reasoning. Family resemblances need imagination, analogy, metaphor, narrative, affect, creativity, metonymy, and a host of other non-rational approaches to grasp (potential) connections, areas of overlap, similarity, and the importance of difference. What is the logical connection between usage of “feed” in the phrases “Feed the meter” and “Feed your child”? There isn’t one. We understand “feed” in each case because of the “body as machine” metaphor. Meaning is established through similarity which is created through metaphor not logic (assuming for the moment the rhetoric/logic binary which has long since been deconstructed but still haunts us) (Pitkin 63). Subjects of family resemblances, then, might be “more practiced” in this kind of reasoning. Indeed, they might be “more inclined” to understand and accommodate abstract intersubjective practices *as forms of reasoning* in the first place.

This paper engages Wittgenstein’s contributions to collective political action through agent centered language. Subjects are “comfortable,” “prepared,” “familiar,” and so on. They (know how to) con-

sciously, willingly, autonomously do things. This language is meant to convey how the subjects of family resemblances are constituted through a discourse of identity that produces different truths about identity than do discourses of unitary identity; a discourse of identity that creates different background, unthematized, un-conscious knowledge about how the world “is” when compared to the world produced by discourses of unitary identity. This knowledge, in turn, helps shape, inform, structure, excite, make (im)possible, (dis)incentive, prioritize, occlude, obscure, and render good, (un)valuable, (in)effective, obvious, self-evident, or counter-intuitive (intersubjective) practices.

As an instance, the subjects of family resemblances might be “better able” to understand another member’s claim to membership on their own terms (and so avoid inadvertently subordinating them—say, by recognizing that member as a member because they are “like me” in some way). And the subjects of family resemblances might be better able to resist creating such a normative hierarchy because this is a practice that they are “familiar” with, since, for them, identities are produced through the overlapping of similarities and differences, which requires them to see the world from others’ perspectives “more frequently” than is required of subjects for whom identity is established by way of a predetermined characteristic common to all members. To belong to the model of family resemblances means undertaking the work of elaborating overlaps. Identity is not “like this” in the world constituted through unitary identity discourse. Members have the characteristics and non-members do not. Thus, the subjects of unitary identity discourse never feel the need to see the world from the perspectives of those excluded from membership in order to ponder why they are members and others are not. These subjects are ignorant of Others, and the possibility of ever finding themselves as outsiders. In comparison then, the subjects of family resemblances would be “better suited” or “more prepared,” in general, to resist identity’s normative force than the subjects of unitary identity discourse. Family resemblances might help individual subjects be constituted “not like *that*” but by other principles, measures, and practices (Foucault, “What is Critique?” 44).

To conclude, consider that family resemblances provide the ground for thinking about and assembling identity-based groups. With heterogeneous subjects, an identity-based group can be treated as a coalition among variously constituted members instead of as a gathering together of those who always already share an identity by way of a predetermined distinguishing characteristic common to members *qua* member (Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing” 166–167; Crenshaw, “Map-

ping” 1298–1299). As coalition, members can belong in many ways and for many reasons. Critically, membership is fluid not fixed. A member can belong through different characteristics at once. A member can belong based on different characteristics over time and in different contexts. A member can differ from other members as well as from oneself and might still belong. Coalitional identity-based groups preserve differences among members. Coalitional groups also preserve identity’s internal differences. These groups do not fix one vision of membership as that which is shared by all members; rather, coalitional groups allow identities’ meanings to change and shift as members come and go. Coalitions allow identity to signify in different ways at once by gathering variously constituted members and allowing identity’s meaning to emerge through the overlapping similarities and differences among these embodied individuals. As the subjects of family resemblances, one can politically mobilize for greater freedom and equality without excluding or marginalizing other subjects through the very practices being used. The cruel irony of pursuing freedom and equality in ways that treat, entrench, and extend the subordination of some so that others can benefit can be avoided.



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Image and Truth: Paradigms of Modern Translation Theory

Rawad Alhashmi

Introduction

The field of translation theory witnessed two revolutionary shifts in the twentieth-century. These paradigm shifts are here attributed to the innovative theories of two key thinkers, the German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin and the American poet and critic Ezra Pound. Despite writing in the same century, and making significant contributions to the development of translation, there are differences in emphasis and approach, which present a scope to be delineated and assessed. This paper, then, seeks to underscore their conceptual accounts in the discipline of translation studies, primarily in terms of how their theories arguably resonate, and where they have diverged along their particular paths.

Conceptualizing Translation

Language calls for translation, and its voice should echo in translation. Not only because it is desirable but also because it is intentional, insofar as it is an ethical act to free language from its confinement through its translatability, which goes beyond the act of communication. Steiner observes, “The existence of art and literature, the reality of felt history in a community, depend on a never-ending, though very often unconscious, act of internal translation” (31). As per Benjamin’s understanding, translatability is possible and achievable. Benjamin strongly advocates translatability for any text, whether religious or profane. For him, “[t]ranslation is a mode” (“The Task of The Translator” 70). For a better understanding of the idea of translatability, the translator has to treat translation as a mode, which is governed by the original; in order for the translator to reveal translatability, he/she has to follow the law and the role of the original in order to achieve true translation. According to Benjamin, translatability deals with something intrinsic in the original, which exhibits itself in the translated work. In Benjamin’s words, “...[t]ranslatability is an essential quality of certain works...that a specific significance inherent in the original...manifests itself in its translatability” (71). This denotes that translatability is associated with what is essential to translation; something significant in the original that manifests only in translation. Thus, languages remain translatable because translation can unfold “an essential quality” of the original language in its translatability. Accord-

ing to Pound, by contrast, translation is not only a creative act but, equally important, a form of criticism. Pound is more concerned with the form, rhythm, image, and diction, as opposed to syntax or abstract concepts (Gentzler 28). He insists that language can be charged or energized in three ways: (1) *phanopoeia*, in which the translator can charge the translation with musical patterns to enhance the aesthetic aspect; (2) *melopoeia*, whereby the translator alters the visual images in order to summon more imagination; and (3) *logopoeia*, in which the translator manipulates the words, directly or indirectly, in order to induce both of the effects by stimulating the associations (intellectual or emotional), which "...have remained in the receiver's consciousness in relation to the actual words" (*ABC of Reading* 63). More significantly, Pound's image approach stems from his concept of "energy in language" (Gentzler 15). As he puts it, "...the image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy" (*Selected Prose* 174–175).

Both Benjamin and Pound agree that translation is an artistic mode in its own right. However, translation is conceived as an interpretive act by Benjamin and a performative one by Pound. Which is to say, Benjamin treats translation as a special mode of intention in each language. To illustrate, Benjamin provides the example of the English "bread," the German "*Brot*," and the French "*pain*," in order to reveal the intentional relationship between a word and its meaning. The aforementioned words refer to different forms, but the intention essentially remains the same, which is complementary in each language; thus "the object is complementary to the intention" ("The Task of The Translator" 74). Pure language gathers various modes of intention into one by harmonizing the interaction into one language. As per Benjamin's theory, the voice of intention ought to be heard in the translation through harmonization or reconciliation among languages, which can be attained only by pure language; this notion of intention is the only way for Benjamin to achieve fidelity in translation. While translation cannot unfold in the hidden relation between languages, it *can* represent this relation through intention as a way of redemption or "...by realizing it [the hidden relation, i.e.] in embryonic or intensive form" (72). In Pound's view, however, translation serves as a special mode of acting—as if playacting in a theatre. The writer of the play is analogous to the rules that govern the literary tradition, the audiences to the readers, the translators to the "actors and actresses," who perform on the stage and discern the author's presupposition by relying on their sensibilities and acting skills. For Pound, it is "...a rendering of a modus of thought or feeling in its context" (*Translations* 11). He further states that the translator should bring "the emotion into focus" (10). Hence, with the aid of extrasensory perception, Pound propounds to

transfer the inner consciousness of authors through translation. In much the same way that an actor prepares for a role by getting into the character's consciousness, Pound's translator enters into the consciousness of the author of the work being translated. In both instances, the audience must suspend its disbelief and accept the idea that such channeling is possible. Translation as a performance act entails a theatrical instance wherein the translator functions as an actor on this virtual stage.

Benjamin differentiates between the translator's task and that of the poet. According to him, "[a]s translation is a mode of its own, the task of the translator, too, may be regarded as distinct and dearly differentiated from the task of the poet" ("The Task of The Translator" 76). It is not necessary to be a poet in order to translate poetry; a good translator can do this task even better than a poet him/herself. He provides several examples of good translators who are not poets. For instance, Johann Heinrich Voss (1751–1826), who translated Homer's poetry, is a poor poet but an excellent translator. Benjamin claims, "[n]ot even literary history suggests the traditional notion that great poets have been eminent translators and lesser poets have been indifferent translators" (76). In addition, there are great poets who are also great translators of poetry such as Johann Christian Friedrich Holderlin (1770–1843) and Stefan Anton George (1868–1933), both of whom translated Charles Baudelaire's work with a high degree of skill. As Paul de Man's "'Conclusions' on Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'" explains, "It is not because they are great poets that they are great translators, they are great poets *and* they are great translators" (de Man 81; emphasis original). The essential difference between the poet and the translator is that the former is chiefly concerned with the meaning to be expressed; that is to say, the poet is attached to the meaning that he/she wants to express, whilst the translator is more interested in the language. "The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [intention] upon the language into which he is translating [while that of the poet] is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects" ("The Task of The Translator" 76). To be more specific, the intention of the poet can be spontaneous and unprompted, whereas that of the translator is purposed and determined, and that is a significant *difference*. For Pound, by contrast, the translator's craft is *similar* to that of the poet's. For him, translating poetry is not that different from composing a poem. That is to say, both the poet and the translator have a similar process in their literary work, inasmuch "...as the poet begins by seeing, so the translator by reading; but his reading must be a kind of seeing. Hence, the miraculous accomplishment of Pound's translations; sitting down before a text, he doesn't chafe at

restrictions unusual to his lyric practice” (*Translations* 10). As long as the poet as well as the translator engage with the same activity (creating a new text), their task is almost the same, insofar as they produce artistic works.

Each thinker, discussed in this study, utilizes his method of translation in his literary practice of translation. To be more specific, Benjamin’s primary interest is *truth*; in his preamble to his translation of Charles Pierre Baudelaire’s *Tableaux Parisiens*, he metaphorically argues that “...for if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade” (“The Task of The Translator” 79). This implies that the fidelity of translation can only be achieved by literalness—that is to say, semantic rendering, as opposed to likeness or mere duplication of the original in order to achieve true complementarity. In fact, Benjamin argues that a work of literature is capable of conveying truth, which is not just a quality but also a part of continued life. As such, it can be revealed through *intention*. According to him, “all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole—an *intention*, however, which no single language can attain by itself but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language” (74; emphasis added). He asserts that “...languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express” (72). In order to unfold the paradoxical and super-historical relationship between languages, Benjamin creates his own philosophical term, “pure language,” gleaned from his interest in Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition. According to him, the connection between languages stems from the intention of language as a whole; such intention cannot be obtained by one single language, but as a totality of all languages, each supplementing the others. The ultimate goal of translation, therefore, is “...expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages” (72).

In contrast to Benjamin, Pound’s pivotal concern is nothing but an ‘image.’ Image, for Pound, “...is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time... It is the presentation of such a ‘complex’ instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits” (*Literary Essays* 4). Pound treats Imagism as a form of poetry. By the same token, T. S. Eliot describes Imagism as “the starting point of modern poetry” (qtd. in Sharpe 39). In fact, Pound perceives a poetic translation as a new poem that is simultaneously a reflection of old poems; his translations of Provençal, Chinese, and Latin are examples of this understanding. Such an assimilation produces a simulacrum, inso-

far as it entails some sort of imitation of the real. In this respect, the American scholar and translation theorist, Lawrence Venuti argues, "Pound's translations put foreign texts in the service of a modernist poetics, evident, for example, in his use of free verse and precise language, but also in the selection of foreign texts where a 'persona' could be constructed, an independent voice or mask for the poet" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 167). Through his remarks on translation, Pound attempts to drift away from the approaches that were exercised in his time.¹

In their respective philosophical theories of translation, both Benjamin and Pound consider the significant role of history. For Benjamin, the value of art lies in its history, which manifests itself in an art form. As such, history must be preserved in translation. "[t]ranslations that are more than transmissions of subject matter come into being when a work, in the course of its survival, has reached the age of its fame" ("The Task of The Translator" 72). This dynamic process involves not merely transferring the content but also establishing the historical values of the original text over time. Herein, Benjamin stresses the importance of history in the process of translation as a continuing growth; translation must reveal the historical significances in its representation of the original. A good translation does not destroy the original language, but rather, it liberates it from its confinement to continue its life and reveals its historical value along with it. Namely, the historical continuity of the art work is its survival in translation, insofar as "their translation marks their stage of continued life" (73). This is due to the kinship of languages, which makes it possible to achieve translatability. In turn, this "kinship of languages" arises from his Kabbalistic concept of "pure language." As a result, history and truth will survive, inasmuch as they are a part of a genuine relationship that will be preserved in the act of true translation. In a like manner, de Man notes, "...the translation belongs to the afterlife of the original" (85).² The relationship between history and translation is complicated, yet they are inextricably involved in what they represent. That is why history

¹This notion of Pound's invention of a modern paradigm of translation is further explained by Ronnie Apter's *Digging for the Treasures*, wherein she demonstrates how some modern translators have been impacted by Pound's theory. In her words: "Modern translators differ from each other in their styles, they have all made a sharp break with the kind of translation of older literatures current at the turn of the century. Following Pound, they translate using new assumptions about the nature and intent of literary translation" (Apter 3).

²For further discussions regarding the idea of translation as "the afterlife of the original," see Paul de Man, "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's The Task of the Translator" in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 85–86.

occupies a central place in translation. For Benjamin, the study of history is necessarily similar to that of translation, for he regards history as "...the scattered fragments of genuine historical experience" (*Selected Writings* 336). The echoes of fragments resonate in translation as well. Translation, according to Benjamin, is a mode of fragmentations of greater language; therefore, the original and the translation belong to a greater language—ur-language. "Thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language..." ("The Task of The Translator" 78). In this notion of fragments, Benjamin somewhat echoes Pound,³ who likewise focuses on small details and fragmented images. Instead of producing a whole or unified image, Pound opts to render fragmented images, as these images constitute a single poem according to his estimation. The meticulous details in any given poem, for Pound, are paramount, because they can sketch a meaningful picture in the hands of a skilful translator. Pound is greatly interested in the fragments and small details in his theory of translation as they "seize the real" (23). In this scenario, the translator is the artist who "...seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment. His work remains the permanent basis of psychology and metaphysics" (*Selected Prose* 23). This suggests that the translator can be seen as an artist giving new life to an artist who came before him.⁴

For Pound, the key to great translation is "telepathy," i.e., the ability of the translator to get inside the head of the writer whose work he/she is translating. In his essay, "How to Read" (1928), Pound states that "every new heave is stimulated by translation; every allegedly great age is a great age of translations" (*Selected Writings* 34-5). More impressive, though, is Pound's ability to make the poetry of the past seem alive in the present, almost contemporary in nature (Apter 47). Pound's legacy of resurrecting dead poems in a modern vernacular is a renewal as well as a revival, wherein they are reborn by the means of his translation. He brings such poems to life by performing an artistic act that fits within modern poetic standards in order to meet the audience's expectation. In this context, Venuti claims that Pound's modernist method of translation can be classified into "interpretive" mode and "original writing." The latter follows the literary terms of

³The juxtapositions between Pound's and Benjamin's methodologies in this regard are best articulated by Richard Sieburth. He notes: "Pound manages to invent a poetic language that always hovers somewhere in between its original historical sources and its contemporary twentieth-century articulation—thereby aiming at that *reine Sprache* (or pure language) which Walter Benjamin defined as the messianic horizon of all translation" (*New Selected Poems and Translations* xiii).

⁴Pound conceives "...translation as a model for the poetic art: blood brought to ghosts" (qtd. in Edwin Gentzler 16).

the translated text (Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader* 12). Thus, it is constituted as a “new poem” in its own right in the target language. Here, “[t]he relation between the two texts doesn’t disappear; it is just masked by an illusion of originality, although in target language terms” (12). Pound’s endeavours, though, are more complex than those of the translators who attempt merely to contemporize older works as he employs a mixture of archaic and modern styles. Nonetheless, his primary concern is *image*; he employs both styles, then, though the modern one is more influential than the mixed style (Apter 4). His technique also is to recall certain eminent authors from the past to the present. In his words, “[m]y job was to bring a dead man to life; to present a living figure” (*Selected Letters* 149). Pound’s methodology is influenced by the Confucian principle: “Make It New.” In this statement, Pound treats *translation as a matter of choice and predilection. The translator’s voice becomes more pronounced in the interest of the modernized image.* In fact, Pound’s achievement as a creative translator is due to his awareness of the necessary interaction of past and present (Sutton 6). Thus, he consciously alters the sensibility of the old poems and intentionally switches their aesthetics to appeal to the modern audiences.

Dichotomies of Translation: Domestication and Foreignization

The oft-repeated insight of the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) regarding the relationship between the author, the translator, and the receiver explores a new way to approach translation, which in turn has impacted the field of modern translation theory, particularly that of domestication and foreignness. “Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him,” he argues; “or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him” (qtd. in Lefevere 74). This statement is apropos of both Benjamin as well as Pound, yet each increasingly diverged from the other as their respective thought continued to evolve. That is to say, Benjamin favors the foreignness approach and offers a more holistic way whereby the translator redeems himself by saving the voice of the author. “This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator” (“The Task of The Translator” 79). For Benjamin, a translator is one who devotes himself/herself to the noble mission of achieving fidelity to the truth of the original work. On the other hand, Pound advocates domestication, yet in a more radical way, inasmuch as there is, so to say, no peace whatsoever—just combat. In Pound’s words, “I don’t see that one translates by leaving in unnecessary words; that is, *words not necessary to the meaning of the whole passage*” (*The Se-*

lected *Letters of Ezra Pound* 265; emphasis added). Here the translator's mission is to 'destroy' the voice of the original, so to speak, as an act of invasion, yet it has to be according to the modern aesthetic principles.⁵ Such an act results more or less in a close resemblance as opposed to re-presentation.

Metaphorically speaking, within Pound's discourse the translator is the hero who conquers different territories (symbolizing different languages and cultures) and overcomes the voice of the author, bringing his/her work into alignment with the rules that govern the literary tradition, thereby ensuring that the work will be better received by readers restricted within their boundary of language and culture. Imagining the translator as a fighter in this context gives a clear sense of the brutality of such an act, inasmuch as there is no ethical concern to preserve the authorial voice of the original work. Hence, the voice of the author vanishes in translation, insofar as the voice in the translated text is always that of the translator. The translator attempts to bring in what the contemporary readers might expect to receive, as opposed to what actually is, regardless of the translator's supposed radical act of undermining the essence of the source text and thereby erasing the trace of the author. In this vein, Edith Grossman in *Why Translation Matters* (2010) argues, "The undeniable reality is that the work becomes the translator's (while simultaneously and mysteriously somehow remaining the work of the original author)" (8). In this context, Schleiermacher's injunction that the translator "...leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (qtd. in Lefevere 74) highlights the role of the translator. It exemplifies Pound's praxis of translation wherein he brings to the reader what he/she expects based on modern tastes, even if it entails reconfiguring the work in a contemporary idiom with no trace of the original voice.

Benjamin's hero, by contrast, is the translator who endeavors to preserve the essential characteristics of the original work and carries them in the target language. In other words, the translator redeems himself by allowing the original work to continue its life in the target language. Such an act is noble and heroic, insofar as the translator pays a greater respect to the original language and even sacrifices himself, emptying out his/her own ego and becoming "invisible," to preserve the voice of the original author/work as well as the particular historical context. However, the readers might find the translated text unrelatable because it holds archaic and/or exotic elements in its heart that shine in

⁵As noted by the Canadian literary scholar Hugh Kenner, "The voice is always the voice of Pound, submitting to the discipline of translation in order to realize persona after persona with unflinching conviction" (*Translations* 14).

the translation and thereby have the risk of being idiosyncratic. In this sense, the spirit of the original lives inside the body of the translated work, inasmuch as there is no trace of the translator's voice. In this process, fidelity is achieved through preserving the historical values and the idiosyncratic characteristics of the original text which, in turn, ensures its survival. Therefore, for Benjamin, the task of the translator is to ensure the survival of the original work by sacrificing him/herself whereas, for Pound, translator is the creator of a new work that caters to the audience.

Furthermore, according to Pound, the fluency of the target language is not essential in order to practice translation. Before the modern period, mastering the original language was deemed a *sine qua non* for a translator. However, Pound invents his own discourse that marks the beginning of exploration of the translator's sensibility by combining his thoughts with those of the author (*New Selected Poems and Translations* 8). Steiner explains, "This insinuation of self into the otherness is the final secret of the translator's craft" (376). Such a claim implies a new theoretical method, enabling the translator to attain a complete recognition of the other author even with a single language, particularly the translator's native language. Put differently, the translator relies heavily on his/her consciousness to recognize and translate the other language. While this artful approach intends to gain favor with audiences, it might risk the impersonation of the original author. This is best exemplified in "Cathay Project" (1915), in which Pound translates a Confucian Chinese text into English without any command over Chinese language, which he did not learn until later. He relies on the notes of Ernest Fenallosa (1853–1908) and his ideogram method.⁶ Pound's gift, though, is to acquire a type of projected sensibility based on an extrasensory perception in order to "...get into the central consciousness of the original author by what we may perhaps call a kind of clairvoyance" (qtd. in Steiner 378). Hence, the focal point here is the subjective concept of cognising consciousness in opposition to an objective intention.

A true translation, for Benjamin, "...is transparent; it doesn't cover the original, doesn't block its light, but allows the pure language as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original" ("The Task of The Translator" 79). This remark asserts that an accurate translation is a diaphanous body, and that the original is the heart

⁶Pound's ideogram method focuses on replacing ideas by images, particularly in poetry (from *abstract* to *concrete*). The notion of this method comes to Pound through his observation of Fenallosa's notes on The Chinese Written Character and the description of how Chinese poetry is written.

that shines through the pure language in the act of translation.⁷ In other words, the fundamental principle of pure language is not to produce a verbatim copy of the original, but rather to “harmonize” different languages in utopian fashion, permitting a rebirth of the translation while at the same time allowing the growth of the original. Such a dynamic process permits the voice of the original to be heard through pure language in the translation. This process is a complementary one, where harmony between languages can be maintained by faithfulness. That is, “the significance of fidelity as ensured by literalness is that the work reflects the great longing for linguistic complementation” (79). Benjamin advocates the fidelity of translation through the command of harmony. Semantic harmony, in turn, can lead to linguistic complementarity.⁸ This approach bespeaks a good translation, which “...expresses the central reciprocal relationship between languages,” wherein it uncovers the affinity of languages through intention because it would remain hidden otherwise (“The Task of The Translator” 72). As such, the harmonious orchestration is the key to activate a meaningful interaction between languages, which can be accomplished through literalness.

A good translation for Pound, however, is akin to a miraculous feat, as best described by Hugh Kenner. “A good translation seems like a miracle because one who can read the original can, so to speak, see the poem before the poet writes it, and marvel at the success of its wrestle to subdue his own language to the vision” (*Translations* 10). Here, Kenner claims that Pound matches his translation theory “...in a spirit of utter fidelity to his material, whether a document or an intuition” (10). Kenner praises Pound’s creativity and sharp intuition in his way of understanding translation. In addition, he offers three strategies of what should be considered as a good translation. He claims that “so many Poundian principles meet in the translator’s act that the best of his translations exist in three ways, as windows into new worlds, as acts of homage, and as personae of Pound’s” (*Translations* 10). Even though the task of translation is simpler than “original composition,” it is still considered a primary text. For Pound, good translations are “new poems in their own right” (qtd. in Apter 3). Pound further argues that the translation of poetry can either focus on painting an image of the original poem or reflect the translator’s subjective clairvoyance.

⁷Commenting on Benjamin’s concept of “pure language,” Carol Jacob’s “The Monstrosity of Translation” observes “The unfixable task of translation is to purify the original of meaning: only poor of translations seek to restore it” (758).

⁸This is best articulated by Venuti, who asserts that: “Benjamin is reviving Schleiermacher’s notion of foreignizing translation, wherein the reader of the translated text is brought as close as possible to the foreign one through close renderings that transform the translating language” (*The Translation Studies Reader* 12).

According to him, the translation of any poem can be "...one of two things: Either it is the expression of the translator, virtually a new poem, or it is as it were a photograph, as exact as possible, of one side of the statue" (qtd. in David Anderson 5).

It is worth mentioning that Pound is notorious for his omission of words and, instead, focussing on image, as in the case of his translation of "Cathay Project." Thus, Pound's primary goal is the revitalization of old Confucian texts into new modern versions. For Pound, the "Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relation, or of a combination of things. It means the thing or the action or situation, or quality germane to the several things that it pictures" (*ABC* 21). Kenner regards this approach as justified. He writes, "If he doesn't translate the words, the translator remains faithful to the original poet's sequence of images, to his rhythms or to the effect produced by his rhythms, and to his tone" (*Translations* 12). Nevertheless, such a symmetrical process is associated with the mainstream of aesthetic of modern literary terms, as opposed to uncovering the archaic treasure per se.

Benjamin conceives translation as an afterlife of the original work wherein the translator's task is to ensure that translation represents the original work in that new life. The protocol of the translator is more or less a performative act of the original work in the translation—the original work never dies per se, insofar as it lives on in the translation. On the other hand, Pound's gift relies heavily on his own sensibility and personae to intuit the author's mental state and ideas—a radically subjective process. Dawn Tsang's "Histrionic Translation" (2015) argues that "Pound's work exemplifies...the melding and mingling of the author's and the translator's subjectivities can be a viable methodology" (Tsang 66). "This insinuation of self into otherness is the final secret of the translator's craft" (Steiner 378). Pound suggests that good translators are like psychics, projecting their consciousness into the mind of the author they are translating. Pound's art of translation arises from his heightened sensibility, which in turn has to do with the unique capabilities aroused in relation to a totality of impressions, thoughts, and feelings. This is perhaps best illustrated in his translation project, *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919), in which Pound uses his own voice in translation, or "imitation," instead of that of the Roman poet. As articulated by Tim Kendall, "this is a pattern that the modern poet adopts to the syntax and vocabulary of his own political present" (198). It should be noted that Pound's subjectivity is dominated by his tastes, which affects the modern standard of translation. In this vein, Venuti remarks that "the relation Pound establishes between his trans-

lations and the foreign text is partial, both incomplete and slanted toward what interests him” (*The Translation Studies Reader* 12). This suggests that Pound opts to convey only what adheres to his own taste and ideology and omits otherwise; hence Venuti remarks that Pound’s translation is incomplete.

Translating Aesthetics: Objective and Subjective Approach

Benjamin as well as Pound stress on the aesthetic qualities in translation, but with different emphasis in effect. On the one hand, Benjamin’s legacy revolves around the objective experience of translation as an artistic mode. In “The Task of The Translator” (1923), Benjamin argues, “No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience” (69). In this paradoxical claim, Benjamin emphasizes the objective nature of the artistic experience over the subjective one—that is to say, the meaning of art is not related to personal experience. In his words, “Art, in the same way, posits man’s physical and spiritual existence, *but in none of its works is it concerned with his response*” (69; emphasis added). Here Benjamin stresses the objectivity of art. The artistic experience is an absolute one, insofar as it entails objectivity, as opposed to subjectivity. “In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form,” he furthers the claim of the objectivity of art as, “...consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful” (69).

According to Benjamin, translation represents the original language, and this form of representation holds at its heart aesthetic qualities, which must be preserved in translation. Translation gives a new life to the original and the latter must be re-presented by the faithful act of the translator. Such a hybrid process of translation is objectively oriented, and as such is a foregone conclusion, as long as the translator preserves the value of art and history over time and therefore truth. The appreciation of the beauty of art relies on its representation of the original work, which transcends communication. That is, the essence of the original can be represented in the translation as an independent form, which entails truth. Namely, the context of the work of art, and its place in history, must never be forgotten or sacrificed simply in order to make it more appealing and accessible to modern readers. For Benjamin, translation is not only an interpretation of meaning but also an appreciation of the aesthetic of the original language. Reducing translation merely to a form of communication, then, “...is the hallmark of bad translations” (69). When translation focuses on transmitting information, it utterly fails to capture its aesthetic values and the historical features along with it. Ergo, the breath of the original work will be lost and the historical significance along with it.

Pound effectually perceives translation as a form of artistic production, though its medium of perception is radically subjective. Pound's thought suggests a more subjectively oriented approach, inasmuch as it is associated with the faculty of perception as well as more centered on the receivers. The translator has to produce an *image* that appeals to the receivers, even if the translator has to choose what to render based on the readers' interest and expectation. Therefore, translation is constructed under the translator's hand by sketching an artistic picture that meets the reader's expectation. The translator, Pound claims, "...can show where the treasure lies" (*Literary Essays* 200). Which is to say, the translator's ability is determined by his/her ability to craft a translation that meets the readers' expectations. For Pound, the process is an artistic innovation, wherein the translator relies on his consciousness and sensibility to construct a desirable image. In this respect, translation is treated as a means of poetic creation crafted by the translator's intuitive consciousness to constitute a new piece of art based on the original work. For Pound, poems are a "...long series of translations, which were but more elaborate masks" (qtd. in Donald Davie 75). Pound's sensible or palpable creativity enables him to put his remarks in the modern landscapes of translation as a translator and theorist. Pound sets a typical example for translators and gives them a wider space to play with the original work as a kind of innovation based on their subjective understanding of the original work. In this regard, Steiner argues, "Pound's genius is largely one of mimicry and self-metamorphosis" (Steiner 376). Yet, Pound's method of personification entails radical subjectivity in perceiving art (376).⁹ Moreover, Pound's poetic approach might not succeed in preserving the truth, inasmuch as the translator has to distort the values of the culture in which the text originated for the sake of the literary tradition that governs the contemporary scene. In this vein, Venuti argues that modernism is a powerful force that seeks to constitute an "aesthetic autonomy" of the translated version by means of domesticating the foreign text in order to comply with the standards of the "modernist agenda" (*The Translator's Invisibility* 165). This suggests that the translator has to sacrifice the original meaning of the text in the interest of the aesthetics of the modern audiences. Consequently, the translator erases the historical value of the original text and distorts it by a renewal process that converts the ancient style to a contemporary one.

⁹Steven J. Willett's *Wrong Meaning, Right Feeling* criticizes this method by stating that: "A poetic translation based on a serious misunderstanding of the original language is still a failure no matter how effective the English may seem to be. If we separate accuracy from invention, as so many Poundians like to do, then we are implicitly claiming that the cultural heart of the original poem need make no substantive contribution to the translation. It takes a very happy mistake for me to ignore fidelity" (Willett 151).

Thus, the translator makes something new, but at the expense of the old text. Pound is notorious in reviving old text in a modern version. In this sense, Apter states that Pound has the sharpest eye in criticizing the Victorian approaches of being “pseudo-archaic diction” (3).

These radical changes in the development of translation—as a form of art by Benjamin and as a *modus* of literary writing by Pound—have led to new ways of understanding translation. Whereas, traditionally, translation was concerned merely with the retransmission of information, Benjamin elevates translation to acquire a primary and artistic status, which goes beyond communication. For him, translation is a mode of artistic writing parallel to any literary work. Pound, by contrast, redefines the concept of translation as a mode of literary production (Nadel 33). Pound argues, “A great age of literature is perhaps always a great age of translation; or follows it” (*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* 232). Such a claim indicates that translation plays a crucial role in constituting literature. In other words, translation is the method that rejuvenates literature. By the same token, Pound stresses that, “English literature lives on translation, it is fed by translation” (34). This suggests that literature and translation are inextricably bound, as translation simultaneously generates literature.

Benjamin is greatly interested in the process of interaction between languages, especially the question of what occurs when languages interact. For him, “the language of a translation can-in fact, must-let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intentio*” (“The Task of The Translator” 79; emphasis original). The voice of intention is the agent to achieve pure language through interaction between languages. “To relieve it of this, to turn the symbolizing into the symbolized, to regain pure language fully formed in the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation” (80). Therefore, “[i]n this pure language-which no longer means or expresses anything but is, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages—all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished” (80). Pure language transcends communication, inasmuch as in the interaction between languages, translation does not reveal everything. In Benjamin’s words,

In all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated; depending on the context in which it appears, it is something that symbolizes or something symbolized. It is the

former only in the finite products of language, the latter in the evolving of the languages themselves. And that which seeks to represent, to produce itself in the evolving of languages, *is that very nucleus of pure language.* (80)

Nonetheless, the purpose of translation, for Benjamin, is to preserve the value of art as well as to ensure the course of life of the original language. This denotes that translation must not re-produce the meaning of the original text into the target text, but, rather, it must allow the growth of the original in the target language. Thus, translation is not a matter of reproduction, but rather, a matter of survival. On the other hand, Pound, unlike Benjamin, believes that the purpose of literature is communication. In his words, “Literature is news that STAYS news” and thereby represents communication regardless of its age (*ABC* 29). Here translation is the major key that rejuvenates literature.

Both theorists have distinctively broken with the tradition of translation, and yet they have approached translation philosophically while contemplating historical perspectives. Benjamin’s accomplishment reflects in preserving the truth through intention and semantic harmony while Pound’s sensibility appeals to readers’ enjoyment in accessing the ancient text in a modern sense by sacrificing the archaisms of old-fashioned standards through the translator’s subjectivity, consciousness, and sensibility. Pound conceives translation as a mission of conquest wherein the translator releases his consciousness to subjugate and assume control of a place or author by using his skills to produce a desirable translation. Ergo, Pound brings remote texts closer to the readers, but without a historical map—that is to say, erasing the border of difference and the significance of age in the interest of the modern literary terms. Benjamin, on the other hand, preserves the original language and allows its growth in the body of the target language. The original is the soul of translation and the latter is the body that inhabits the original. Benjamin maintains not only the historical value, but also carries the original message across the ages. Pound, though, examines translation as a renewal process, inasmuch as it is extracted from the old text, but in a modern form; Pound’s translation is a rebirth from the original language, a renewal process which helps to “Make It New.”

While Benjamin’s perspective of translation entails a *survival* process, Pound’s is focused on a *revival*. Pound is able to create a relationship between past and present by recalling the past in a modern voice. Even though both treat translation as a form of artistic writing, they diverge in observing it. While Benjamin perceives it as an objective body, Pound regards it as a subjective one. Interestingly, both

thinkers apply their theory to their respective works. Undoubtedly, Benjamin and Pound's concepts, including truth, image, intention, art, pure language, and energy of language have fashioned the contemporary landscapes of translation. It is evident that Benjamin embraces the semantic approach of translation in order to preserve the idiosyncratic features and the historical value of the original and thereby truth. Pound, on the contrary, advocates Imagism wherein the translator can rely on the general hint of the original text in order to produce images, as opposed to ideas in the target text. The translator is free to render or imitate what he wants to convey by relying on his sensibility towards the translated text. The translator's invention is a magical mirror that reflects old texts in modern images. Whereas Benjamin's literary figure is survival, his ethical figure is truth, and his objective figure is art. Pound's literary figure is renewed production, his principle is image, and his subjective mode is sensibility and consciousness. Overall, both thinkers offer a solid theoretical understanding of different contemporary models of translation theory and practice that inspired many subsequent scholars and translators in the field.



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Written and Over-written: Investigating Metafictional Strategies in Janet Frame's *The Carpathians*"

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Unlike several movements in literature, postmodernism lacked a specific manifesto and often varied in its concerns depending on the media that it engaged with. However, on the whole, postmodernist fiction is generally characterized as being playfully (and highly) self-reflexive and self-conscious of its status as artifice, dominantly leaning towards the 'creation' of reality in language rather than the reflection of reality in language, celebrating the multiplicity of voices and narratives over (humanistic) faith in metanarratives (as famously stated by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition*), indulging in intertextuality, and highlighting the discursive nature of the text, the reader, and the writer. Linda Hutcheon states that postmodernism is a cultural activity that incorporates what it contests, centralizes what is decentralized, and is, thus, a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" movement. These aspects make pastiche and parody fundamental to understanding postmodernist fiction (Hutcheon 3). All in all, postmodernist fiction revels in its status as fiction and is greatly concerned with matters of textuality, and the conflation of language and reality (within and without the fictional world). In addition to these features, the term 'metafiction' is conspicuously attached to the idea of a postmodern novel.

Metafiction, or self-conscious fiction, is a commentary on the act and art of fictionalizing within the bounds of the fictional world; thereby, a postmodernist text exhibits how the fictional world is created where the instructions or method of creation come as part of the finished product. That is, a metafictional text systematically addresses itself as a fiction or a construct within the framework of the fictional narrative itself. Metafiction can also be understood as the practice of exploring a "theory" of fiction—or what fiction means and how it is related to the real world—through the "practice" of fiction (Waugh 2, 4). Waugh suggests that in deliberately exposing itself as an act of artifice, metafiction is able to problematize the presumed certainties that realist representations (in fiction) claim to present. John Barth, whose *Lost in the Funhouse* (1963) is a salient instance of metafiction, defines metafictional novels as those that "imitate" novels more than they do the real world (qtd. in Currie, 161).

Like metalanguage and metanarrative, metafiction is symbolic of the general interest in the construction of realities and in the ways

we (outside the fictional realm) mediate our experiences in the world. “Meta” implies a level of discourse, an extra level, as it were. Using “meta” terms, we are able “...to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it *apparently* refers” (Waugh 3). In fiction, it means to be able to explore the relationship “...between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction” (3). It could also be understood as a “...tendency within the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame-break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion” (14). That is, the opposition is set from *within* the form of the work of fiction itself. Like the postmodernist principle of Hutcheon’s both/and, metafictional novels both construct a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and simultaneously lay bare the act of construction. This leads to foregrounding interpretation and deconstruction at the expense of creation and criticism (6). It is, quite clearly, a symptom of the formal and ontological insecurities typical of postmodernism, and suggests that the world itself is arguably constructed by discourses and language systems.

Janet Frame’s novel *The Carpathians* (1988) exemplifies several postmodernist techniques as well as the ontological concerns that underlie the deployment of metafiction. Among others, the novel makes use of the embedded Chinese box narrative structure, self-aware, unreliable and interrupting narrators, and metafictional utterances exposing the underlying *make* of the work of fiction. The novel in question also explores the *trace*-like nature of fictional characters and their existence as wholly dependent on language (i.e. as textual beings), and plays up the struggles of multiple narrators and characters to capture narrative space as well as to solidify themselves through linguistic records, while being highly aware of the discursive nature of language and memory’s precarious status within language.

Frame’s *The Carpathians*, in its basic plot, is the story of an American woman named Mattina Brecon, her stay in a fictional town in New Zealand, the events that occur during her stay, and her return to, and eventual death in, New York. However, the way these events unfold, the narrators and narratives which unfold these events, and the events themselves, render this novel squarely in postmodernist sensibilities. Mattina Brecon, a middle-aged American millionaire heiress, lives with her husband, Jake Brecon, and their son, John Henry, in New York. Mattina is a patron of the arts while Jake is a writer. After his first novel, published while he was still a young man, Jake finds himself suffering from a writer’s block that has lasted almost thirty years, contiguous with their marriage. Partly in order to feed him sto-

ries, insights, and memories so that he can write again,¹ partly for her personal quest to “know” unfamiliar people in their national, regional, and cultural contexts, and partly because she senses a deep lack in spite of living a privileged and comfortable life, Mattina travels to distant, strange places (as unlike New York as possible in her imagination) on a quest to understand and observe the *Other*, to collect stories and record memories, and to fill the gaps in her own life. These encounters are not always as profound as she expects them to be and her quest to record the lives of others is gently mocked through the narrator(s)’s interventions every now and then. She is also simultaneously very conscious of her own existential ephemerality, and this anxiety produces in her the feeling that she must buy land in these places, as if trying to plant herself—or her identity—in solid ground. This desire also betrays an underlying anxiety of being erased or disappearing or being rendered invisible, and this fear is often articulated via her stream of consciousness as well as the comments of the omniscient narrator. She often believes herself to be a character composed of mere words, the loss of which will also mean complete obliteration of self. Other characters in the novel, unable to come to terms with their status as only a part of the narrative, also share this anxiety.

One of her journeys to explore the *Other* and to record firsthand experiences is to Puamahara, a fictional town in New Zealand popularized through travel brochures as the site of folkloric legend of the Memory Flower.² Mattina is put up in Number Twenty-Four, Kowhai Street. The ostensible aim of her two month stay is to document, record, and understand the lives and personalities of her neighbors as well as to study the legend in its native context. She poses as a novelist to her neighbors and there are several instances wherein the people (characters) around her respond to her questions because they too express anxiety about being forgotten; any form of representation that may preserve them and keep them alive would be preferable

¹The readers are told that Jake Brecon’s first novel, *The Battlefields of New York*, was a huge success but has since left him unable to create a fictional work of similar depth. However, he is suspicious of Mattina’s help: “[t]here had been times when, overcome with crippling shame at his inability to write his second novel, Jake had the wild suspicion that Mattina, realising his anguish, may have been deliberately ‘feeding him’ characters and stories that might inspire his writing” (Frame 175). Suspicion of “truthful” accounts, stories, and memories, as well as authorial anxieties, run deep at all narrative levels in *The Carpathians*.

²In the Maori language, the novel explains, “pua” is flower and “mahara” is memory. The legend of the Memory Flower is also called the Legend of the Memory Land, or Maharawhenua—“whenua” means both land and placenta. It is ironic that the place that means ‘the birth site’ is, in the actual world of the novel, a popular place for retirees to live out their last years, and eventually becomes the site of the obliteration of language.

to being erased altogether. In a manner, this showcases an awareness of their own representative nature, not as three dimensional people but as characters reduced to the two dimensional reality of words on paper. For instance, one of her neighbors, Ed, presses Mattina (and through her, Jake) to write about them, as if “Ed’s only existence now might depend on the flat pages of a book with his human essence converted into words and he himself closed forever unless someone chanced to open the book and read it, meeting Ed, with Ed now existing also in the reader’s mind but nowhere else, not in any living dimension” (Frame 109). Brian McHale explains this feature of postmodernist narratives: “Not only are presented objects and worlds partly indeterminate and potentially ambiguous, they are also...lacking the plenitude and density of real objects in the real world” (32). The belief that language constitutes, rather than represents, reality is essential to metafiction. Metafiction relies on the idea that language creates reality and, therefore, we (the people in the real world, as reflected by people in fictional worlds) are inhabiting roles rather than selves (Waugh 3).

One night in Puamahara, Mattina senses that the space of her bedroom has become filled with an invisible, primitive, and heavy animal-like presence. This “animal of long ago” may be thought of as a representation of the essence of memory, conflating past and present, here and now, and there and then, that has crossed over from memory and folkloric legend into the physical world. In other words, a story (with all the history and mini-stories embedded in it) has acquired a breathing, spatial form. Mattina feels as though it is causing the “...reduction of the room, Mattina, the house, the street and its people...to a two-dimensional existence...a world-scape without volume, with their present image of themselves an illusion only” (100–101). The relationship between three-dimensional reality and two-dimensional textual existence is closely entwined in the ruminations of all characters in the novel. A few weeks after this, another inexplicable and incomprehensible event befalls Kowhai Street and its residents, and only Mattina and Dinny Wheatstone (one of the other residents) are spared. A “quasar” called the Gravity Star (mentioned in the opening pages of the novel) exerts its effect on this little street, causing all known languages to disappear and the speakers of those languages to become animal-like after being robbed of their language. A deluge of alphabets, fecal matter, and diamond dust causes a catastrophe with terrible repercussions for the residents.

Both Mattina and Jake (who eventually becomes the recipient of Mattina’s testimony) are shocked to find out that the event is not recalled by anyone (except an old woman, Connie Townsend, who lost her family but is believed to be senile and, therefore, untrustworthy)

nor does anyone want an explanation as to what transpired that night. Banal explanations such as mounting debts or personal problems are accepted as truthful causation for an entire street of people disappearing overnight. This lack of curiosity can be interpreted as disbelief in the extraordinary, but more accurately as a comment on the nature of historiography as itself a product of, and in, language. The folkloric land of memory is parodied as the modern site of forgetting, while also highlighting how local (or *petit*, as Lyotard terms them) histories are often erased in larger arcs of history making—in this case, the desire to normalize the history of a region must perforce erase an inexplicable event. Lyotard asserts that postmodernism “...refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (xxv)—something that the residents of city of Puamahara are unable to do.

Mattina returns to New York a few days after the event after having purchased all the houses on Kowhai Street to preserve the memory of those who have disappeared. However, in a week’s time, she is diagnosed with cancer (in the pages leading up to this, there is mention of some latent symptoms that Mattina had been ignoring). In the months before she dies, she relates all her memories of Kowhai Street to Jake, especially the night of the rain of the alphabet as “something strange” or “terrible” or “marvellous” (Frame 166). However, she is unable to put her finger on what exactly had transpired in those two months, and Jake believes much of her recollections to be confused ramblings. She eventually succumbs to her illness, “...surrendering at last her *point of view*” (170, emphasis added). Mattina is not alone in being equated to a “point of view”; Dinny, the other characters on Kowhai Street, and even John Henry (presumably the omniscient narrator) project themselves as constructed in and through language, and thus can only offer points of view as opposed to rightfully occupying the narrative space bestowed on characters of conventionally realist novels. Patricia Waugh suggests that postmodernist characters do not inhabit a world of “...eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures” (7), much like the characters in *The Carpathians*. This novel, John Henry states at the very beginning, is not just about “maintaining point of view” as a matter of survival but rather, “with *being* a point of view” (Frame n.pag.). Jake visits Puamahara after Mattina’s death, as she had requested, and finds that the entire street is still empty, as are the memories of those outside of the street. For instance, the real estate agent, Albion Cook, betrays some vaguely worded worry about an unnamed event but claims to have no memory of who inhabited the street or what transpired that night. Jake, in turn, expresses the desire that John Henry (also a novelist) turn his parents’ memories of Puamahara, the exis-

tence of the residents of Kowhai Street, and the Legend of the Memory Flower into an (immortalizing) novel—ostensibly the one the reader is in the process of reading. As is expected of a metafictional world, the novel is peopled with multiple authors (and the implications of this technique are underscored as well): Mattina—the pretend novelist, Jake—the flash-in-the-pan novelist with writer’s block, John Henry—the unexpected novelist, and Dinny Wheatstone, by her own admission—an “imposter” novelist “with leave to occupy all *points of view*” (Frame 44, emphasis added). Accordingly, there is much meditation on language as well as the fictional status of the novel. Early in the novel, the omniscient narrator puts forth the manifesto: “Let me then use the old-fashioned words in their old-fashioned meanings...to tell the story...” effectively forewarning a loss of language in the latter part of the narrative (16–17). In another place in the novel, the preface to the story of a murdered woman (Madge McMurtrie) is thus articulated: “In the town of the Memory Flower she deserves a chapter written in the course of daily work among memories” (27). The murdered woman herself is referred to as “penultimate Madge”; even in death, she is not completely erased because she exists in the world of the novel and lives through the words in which she is captured.

The novel’s plot is framed with narratives nestled within other narratives, percolating narrative levels, and unreliable narrators. The novel, printed and bound as a physical object, is authored by Janet Frame, as is indicated on the cover page, copyright and publication details, and by a note of acknowledgement at the beginning. This is the first level of framing. Moreover, a preface at the opening of the novel is signed by a “J. H. B.,” and the ending is a postscript note³ signed by “John Henry Brecon” (the very same J. H. B.). John Henry is a fictional character: Mattina’s and Jake’s son. His parenthetical notes state that what conspires between these two notes is a work of fiction with possible roots in his “reality.” In the sandwiched pages lies the entire fictional world, along with John Henry himself as a character (not in first person but rather through the voice of the omniscient narrator, likely himself). The opening note provides a parodic disclaimer proclaiming the fictional status of the novel: “[t]he characters and happenings in this book are all invented and bear no relation to actual persons living or dead” (n. pag.). On the other hand, the postscript informs the reader that the novel was not just a figment of John Henry Brecon’s imagination but a novel gleaned from what his father narrated and

³The opening and closing notes follow several commonplace conventions. The opening note ends with a line of acknowledgements: J. H. B.’s mother’s trip to New Zealand and his father’s love for books that are the inspirations behind the present work. The endnote carries a date—1987. The novel, *The Carpathians*, was published in 1988.

what his mother experienced. In other words, it simultaneously reinstates the “reality” and the fictionality of the story. .

Yes, he [Jake] told me. And I travelled to Puamahara. And what I have just written is the novel he spoke of; or perhaps it is merely notes for a novel? And perhaps the town of Puamahara, which I in my turn visited, never existed? Nor did my mother and father in the way they are portrayed, for they died when I was seven years old...What exists, though, is the memory of events *known and imagined*.... (Frame 196, emphasis added)

What the reader has just read, John Henry says in the postscript, is his second novel.⁴ Unreliability abounds in his statements: he claims that the narrative is completely fictional because his parents died when he was seven years old; however, in the novel itself, his character develops until he is around thirty years of age. The events in the novel, as per John Henry, are simultaneously (or partly) real and imagined, and memory (oral and written) is perhaps a source but these questions are never properly settled. As is typical of metafiction, this is self-reflexive act of fictionalizing, and the reader is constantly reminded that the text in front of her, while ostensibly reflecting the real world, is a deliberate act of imagination and creation carried out by the narrator and the author.

Either an omniscient narrator or John Henry⁵ occupies the space of narration in the text. And within this narrative centered on Mattina, there is another manuscript (about Mattina) written by the “imposter novelist” Dinny Wheatstone. Dinny’s manuscript occupies many hours and pages of Mattina’s textual existence while she is in Puamahara. Nestled within Dinny’s hypodiegetic and episodic narration are mini-histories of the residents of Kowhai Street. Such a Chinese box structure—wherein recursiveness occurs for its own sake (McHale 115)—further throws narrative stability into confusion. So, while a regular realist narrative posits distinct roles for the narrator, the

⁴John Henry’s first novel is also mentioned in the last quarter of the novel. It is titled *The Diviner*, presumably about someone who can intuit or foretell events. Dinny Wheatstone also claims that she does not create but “divines” the lives and thoughts of those around her (Frame 57). Dinny is presented in the novel much before the reader is informed of John Henry’s novel. In this manner, John Henry’s novel (and protagonist) mirrors the imposter novelist Dinny (who may or may not also be John Henry’s creation). This creates one more instance of confusion for the reader, because it highlights the unreliability of narrators.

⁵The distinction needs to be maintained since John Henry is also a character in the narrative, and does not necessarily match the impressions a reader would gather from the pre- and post-script.

protagonist, and the other characters, this postmodernist text mixes up these roles and confuses the boundaries that define these functions (115). This is especially so in the case of John Henry and Dinny, who are both characters as well as narrators, and who also usurp each other's voices as well as Mattina's inner world, time, and narrative space. Mark Currie points out that postmodernist fictional worlds revel in highlighting their own artifice through a variety of means including allowing the apparent author/narrator to interrupt the fabric of fictional reality so as to expose themselves as the creators or arbitrators of this reality. Like other postmodernist fiction, *The Carpathians* also creates what Currie calls "surrogate author(s)" who occupy the role of, or reflect on, the function of the real-world author (*Postmodern Narrative Theory* 3).

By conventional definition, Mattina Brecon is the protagonist of the novel and her stay in Puamahara is the focal point of the novel. Yet from pages 51 to 115 of the novel, encompassing a large part of her two month stay there, it is not her account or that of the conventionally reliable omniscient narrator that is presented. Instead, it is in Dinny Wheatstone's manuscript that Mattina's life in Puamahara is predicted, or unfolds as her life is unfolding, or simply supplants her life (an intertextual nod, perhaps, to Melquíades's script in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*). This confusion is never directly addressed, but becomes part of the storytelling. It is also primarily in this manuscript that the reader is introduced to the residents of Kowhai Street. The manuscript lays out their individual thoughts and concerns, interpersonal conversations, interaction with Mattina, and impressions of her. As such, Dinny's intervention and her explanations of her imposter-ism lay bare the mechanism of the novel—her manuscript "imitates" a novel more than it does the real world, akin to what John Barth describes as the hallmark of postmodernist fiction (Currie, *Metafiction* 161). Dinny also announces, within her manuscript, that Mattina "is reading my typescript" (Frame 95), conflating the character outside her manuscript with the one inside, and also the character's time (Mattina's supposed future in terms of her stay in Puamahara is confused with her present moment of reading the manuscript). Mattina is set up as the reader here: the text unfolds with words and in the present time and act of reading, but the events have already occurred. She is also the protagonist of the event and the question of whether (and when) these actions occurred or are simply imagined by the author is left unanswered.

On the surface, the section titled "Wheatstone Imposter" appears to be no different than a typical realist narrative where the omniscient author has complete control over the characters' lives and

thoughts, and provides a bird's eye view from the standpoint of a logocentric creator. However, Dinny proclaims the artifice of this section by calling herself the official imposter, with the uncanny "leave to occupy all points of view" like all realist novelists do (44). She asserts that she has no subjectivity and can occupy the space of all characters, their innermost thoughts, past experiences, and futures. She also claims that she is not creating fiction because these characters are "real" (in the world of the novel) and she appears to be *divining* their inner beings rather than creating them. Isabella Zoppi suggests that in this manuscript, Mattina "...recognizes herself (as she was both before and after settling down in Kowhai Street) in the thoughts and actions of a character in the typescript Dinny has put in her letterbox" (157). Even though the character of Mattina in the manuscript is fictional but it also resembles Mattina, the real character. Of course, the real world reader has no yardstick by which to judge how "fictional" this assessment of Mattina's life is. It must be kept in mind that if Dinny claims to be a diviner and not a creator, then it is a likelier interpretation that the manuscript is about Mattina, not someone like her, and therefore is predicting her life rather than creating it. Dinny's manuscript highlights its fictional status within its own parentheses by remarks such as: "[t]hat evening Mattina opened the typescript left by Dinny Wheatstone, and began to read" (Frame 51). Her manuscript, predicting the actions of her reader Mattina (and mirroring the real-world reader as well), ends thus:

Mattina closed Dinny Wheatstone's typescript and set it on the bed-table. Her emergence from the typescript confused her... It is now almost two months since I [Mattina] came to Puamahara, yet it is true that I have just arrived here. Is it possible that I have lived here for both spans of time, both within reality, that after my first week, when I began to read this manuscript, my three-dimensional existence became two-dimensional but no less real within the pages of Dinny Wheatstone's narrative while she, writing her story, also moved within the present and future?... 'I have been in parentheses,'... 'And emerging from this typescript, I leave in a few days for New York and my home.' (115)

As Brian McHale pointed out, the postmodernist fictional world becomes "less the mirror of nature" and more visibly an "artifact" or "made thing" (30). For instance, the reader cannot define whose point of view is being presented. If one keeps in mind the various narrators and narratives embedded in this text, it is impossible to determine the 'true' nature of this manuscript, and if it is an unmediated (i.e. unedited) insertion, a partial insertion (rather than the entire manuscript

which is supposed to be novel-length), an (interpreted) summary, or a complete ‘fiction’ produced by John Henry or by Mattina, or even by Jake; neither can it clearly be articulated what truth, if any, has been made available.

The next section of the novel, in John Henry’s/the omniscient narrator’s voice, begins as an affirmation of the passing of time: “It was indeed so: in three days Mattina would be on the plane to New York” (Frame 119). This raises questions about the truth of the events that have occurred. Considering Mattina’s mission was to meet and record her interactions with her neighbors, it is unsettling that as readers, we know nothing about what she did for most of the duration of her stay except through Dinny’s scripting of Mattina’s life. The descriptions of Mattina taking notes, recording her thoughts, and pondering over the truth of the Gravity Star, and the presence in her room can no longer be clearly slotted as her actions or as those divined or created by Dinny. Matters are not helped by Dinny’s own interruptions announcing her status as the “author of this imposter record” (57) who is “intent on manipulating points of view,” and has the freedom to “...choose from daily life the commonplace facts of weather, accidents, quarrels, deaths, losses, gains, delights” (95). This also serves as a comment on authorship (in the real world): authors of realist texts, while appearing to present a holistic picture and keeping themselves absent from the text, are nevertheless already implicated in the act of choosing or creating events, characters, characteristics, place and time, and the words that bring these to life in the imagination. The postmodernist writer/narrator has simply acquired a degree of comfort with their existence as such, and of their fictional worlds as fiction. On the one hand, Mattina is worried about the fate of the residents who have become so close to her and who confided their deepest concerns to her and believes she could walk into any house in her neighbourhood and be welcomed. On the other hand, she (as a usurped character) is not able to answer whether she actually ever met any of them except briefly before Dinny’s manuscript takes over: “Mattina, unable to deny or confirm her fictional experiences of almost two months, forced herself to weave them into her memory...as a form of truth composed of the real and the unreal” (121). The only solution offered to this conundrum is: “Anything is or will be possible” (123). The reader knows that Dinny Wheatstone is a resident on Kowhai Street because Mattina meets her in the first part of the novel, outside of the manuscript. Dinny tells her that she has put her fourth novel in Mattina’s letterbox the day Mattina first meets her, implying that she had divined Mattina’s visit and her purpose. The matter is further complicated by Mattina’s ability to see herself distinctly as a character in Dinny’s novel, as the reader of this novel, as well as a person in her own right. Her

inner thoughts—"I seem to have fallen under the spell of Kowhai Street, Mattina thought" (101)—are offset by her appearing to free herself of the imposter novelist creating her within the manuscript: "At least I'm not at risk of losing substance. For the moment, I'm the observer, the holder of the point of view, and even Dinny Wheatstone's presence can't erase my work" (76). Obviously, there is no way of ascertaining if Mattina has indeed broken free or if Dinny is only mocking her (and us). To add to the unreliability, Mattina and Dinny have a conversation about the manuscript after Mattina has read and returned it. Dinny asks: "You read about the winter world, in my typescript," to which Mattina reacts thus: "'Surely,' Mattina said hastily, trying to remember. Wasn't there mention of a graveyard, mute Miltons, undiscovered Hampdens?" (123). There is no such mention, at least not for novel's reader. There is, thus, a constant reiteration of the fictional status of everything that has occurred—or not occurred—in the world of the novel.

Thus, there are several narrative levels embedded within each other in the novel: Frame's novel, John Henry's narrative, Dinny's manuscript, and Mattina within Dinny's manuscript fighting her way out. It is possible that the manuscript is actually John Henry's creation or the manuscript is genuine, was found among Mattina's effects, and inserted verbatim by John Henry. Has the imposter novelist taken over Mattina's life in Puamahara, or has another novelist (John Henry) her entire life? While Mattina is a creation of Frame, is she also a creation of John Henry, and partially of Dinny (who are of course both created by Frame)? Through the creation and imposition of the "imposter" novelist on, and within, the narrative, the reader is also confronted with the question—whose point of view are we exposed to? In view of Mattina's objective to record experiences, we must perforce confront the artificiality of documentation and the unreliability of the project of gathering knowledge. It also, like much postmodernist fiction, destabilizes the veneer of trustworthy reality that realist fiction has traditionally posed. Rather than present a 'truth' that can be accepted, the novel now exhibits narratives vying with each other for legitimacy, and highlights the discursive nature of 'truth' itself. It appears to posit that the voice that grabs the narrative space becomes the source of truth, and thus highlights the provisional nature of its creation and sustainment in language. This also has implications for the reader in the real world. We are forced to grapple with the unreliability of the narratives laid out before us, the simulation in words of a seemingly realist world, and of linear time and space. Waugh explains that metafiction has "...not only provided novelists and their readers with a better understanding of the fundamental structures of narrative; it has also offered extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the

world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems” (9). The implications that metafictional strategies have on the real world reader’s understanding of her own world, of truth, and of language, are mirrored in Mattina’s engagement with Dinny’s manuscript as well as John Henry’s role in the novel.

In the opening chapter of *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Brian McHale arrives at what he sees as a shift of the “dominant” (a term borrowed from Roman Jakobson) from epistemological to ontological, coterminous with modernist and postmodernist fiction’s concerns through a comprehensive analysis of Euro-American literary fiction spanning the 21st century. He also states that the two dominants are not watertight compartments; rather, they are always overlapping, but one may see a higher preponderance of one over the other in the two styles/modes of fictionalizing (modernist and postmodernist). Questions of an epistemological nature related to circulation and accessibility of knowledge such as: “What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?...” are asked by modernists (McHale 9). In the postmodernist, “post-cognitive,” ontological phase, questions such as these are foregrounded: “What is a world?; What kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?...” (10). Such ontological concerns of postmodernism in *The Carpathians* are voiced in the alteration of the “being” of the characters, effected through two (fictitious) poles: an indigenous legend (of the memory flower) and a scientific discovery (the Gravity Star). The latter is directly germane to postmodernist tendencies. The novel describes it is a “quasar” called the Gravity Star. It is mentioned in the opening note and recurs frequently in Mattina’s ruminations. The opening note quotes from a “Press Association Report” which defines the Gravity Star as a galaxy, simultaneously—and implausibly—close and several billion light years away from the earth: “the paradox is interpreted as being caused by the focusing of light from a distant quasar (starlike object) by the gravity of an intervening galaxy” (Frame n. pag.). If the Gravity Star were to affect any part of the earth, it would—being the paradox itself—abolish the all-too-familiar binaries of distance and time as we know them by destroying language since such concepts exist in language and language—and subsequently the world—is constructed from such binaries. The Gravity Star, therefore, is the harbinger of a new reality that will collapse dualities to give rise to a new reality.

The Gravity Star is also another example of postmodernist fiction's primary identifiers, as per McHale, which is the use of science fiction tropes (McHale 65). The difference, though, is that unlike most science fiction, postmodernist fiction is more likely to focus on the social, historical, and political implications of technological or other types of interventions, rather than the intervention itself (66). The Gravity Star functions as what Darko Suvin would call a "novum." Suvin avers that a science fiction text is defined by the novum it employs, "...which is usually science or technology and which renders the difference a material rather than just a conceptual or imaginative one" (Roberts 7). The Gravity Star's very physical effects on the characters in the novel are crucial to its meditation on the existence in language.

Mattina estimates, after witnessing the rain of alphabets one night (which is the Gravity Star exerting an effect on one part of the planet), that the Gravity Star will eventually lead to the birth of new concepts to re-configure the world, and a new language, commensurate with the new reality, will be fashioned. Until then, the world, suddenly "...deprived of its standards of sanity moulded within its written and spoken languages," would have to remain suspended in a phase of chaos due to the collapse of boundaries between naturalized binaries that order normative reality (Frame 119). The novel posits that the influence of the Gravity Star is not superfluous. Rather, it is necessary in order to rescue the world, "...plunged into a swamp of absurdity, [and] contradiction," to re-form perspective and language, and make people "once again whole, meaningful, new" (101). Binaries⁶ like "...near and far, then and now, here and there, the homely words of the language of space and time" become useless, essentially causing an alienation of humans and language (14).

⁶For Jacques Derrida, binary oppositions such as presence/absence, speech/writing, logos/mythos, literal/metaphorical, and central/marginal, that form the basis of Western philosophy, need to be deconstructed, but not in order to create a "monism" in which only the heretofore secondary term (absence, writing, mythos, metaphor, and the marginal) remains. Rather, deconstruction tries to show that the opposition is a metaphysical and ideological imposition, and one must try to expose the presuppositions that underlie it, as well as the metaphysical values invested in these oppositions. At the same time, it does not aim to simply neutralize the binary. Rather, its focus is on the act of exposing the constructed status of the binary. By questioning hierarchical oppositions, deconstruction also critiques supposedly scientific "metalanguages" (Culler 199). A metalanguage is a set of terms or concepts that is used to analyze a domain but is regarded as external to that domain, and therefore not affected by the objects it describes. One of the aims of deconstruction is to study how the supposedly external, and hence neutral, metalanguage is affected by the very phenomenon it is trying to structure.

The night of the rain of the alphabet is described in detail in the novel (125–131). Mattina is woken up by the abrupt departure of the primitive breathing presence from her room, and hears horrifying wails, screams, and shrieks in a chorus of languages unheard of: a cacophonous and incomprehensible mixture of consonants and vowels. There is a shower of a mixture of clay, mud, feces, and bright flakes like diamonds, and this mixture falls in the shapes of punctuation marks, musical notes, and letters of the alphabet of all languages. The neighbors are outside their houses with confusion and hopeless anger written across their faces as they realize that their language has failed them (or, they have failed language). They stand rooted to their spots, their eyes shining like nocturnal animals. Like the Biblical flood, this deluge washes away the cumulative being of the whole street. Meanwhile, noises on other streets continue as if nothing has changed. But on Kowhai Street, Mattina witnesses the residents turning into primitive beings with their clothes shredded, unable to produce anything except basic speech sounds as if they have been forced to return to a pre-lingual stage in a sudden and cruel sleight of rain that glitters on the street and on roofs.⁷ However, this is the inaugural moment of the new paradigm and knowledge which is simultaneously, and paradoxically, ancient as well as utterly new. Even amid the primitive sounds that betray the futile attempts of the residents to communicate, Mattina detects "...a hint, an inkling of order, a small strain recognizable as music," which is "...not a replacement of what had been lost" but a new language, and thus new concepts (126). Thus, language, being in language, and the order of the world are washed away (or deconstructed) through the Gravity Star's effect but a new order has yet to come about. Only Dinny (the imposter) and Mattina (the foreigner) are spared this "disaster of unbeing, unknowing" (129). Mattina returns to the safety of her house after the affected have given up trying to make sense of the situation and returned to their houses, and finds a residual drop on her hand that looks like a "small cluster like a healed sore." She picks at it, and the scab crumbles. Upon examining it, she finds it is "...a pile of minute letters of the alphabet, some forming minute words, some as punctuation marks; and not all [are] English letters..." (129). She discovers that each speck which rained is a microcosm of

⁷It can be extrapolated that the effects of the Gravity Star are also akin to those of the aftermath of chemical warfare, a holocaust, or the explosion of an atom bomb. As is often the case with new-age technology-driven genocides in the real world, there is mute agony, incomprehensible pain, efficient covering up by governmental agencies, and attempts to obliterate the memory of such an event in dominant historiography (here, among the other people in the town and the media). These aspects closely resemble the event described in the novel. However much the reader wishes to place faith in the record of the event from an ordinary witness, it must be kept in mind that her record is also greatly usurped by the various narrators. The very availability of the 'truth' of historical events is thus problematized.

all languages known to humans. However, instead of replenishing those that received it, it has washed away all traces of the alphabet from them. McHale terms such a literary motif the “cancelled character strategy” wherein “...narrated events...can be un-narrated...projected existents—locales, objects, characters, and so on—can have their existences revoked” (McHale 103).

The next morning, all those affected are removed in government vans quietly and efficiently; their possessions or physical traces (of memory) are erased as well. In this incident, the residents lose their language and thus their ability to remember themselves or cement their place in history. Their removal, spatially and historically, points to their existence only in language. The novel itself is ambiguous not only about what happened that altered reality, but also the exact nature of this alteration, suggesting that Mattina’s inability to fully articulate it in adequate language is the same as the narrator’s/author’s.

Juxtaposed with the catastrophe of forgetting is the second fictive pole of the novel: the legend of the Memory Land, or “Maharawhenua.” According to an ancient Maori legend (as presented in the novel), a young woman was chosen by divine beings to collect the memory of her land and rescue it from oblivion. She travelled its length and breadth in search of memory, amply aided by other creatures, nature, and people. Eventually, she picked and tasted a ripe fruit from a tree and thus released the memory that she had collected into the very air and nature of her land. This is a clear reversal of the Biblical myth of Eve tasting the fruit of knowledge and being banished from paradise. The woman of the Memory Legend is an exonerated and venerated Eve: “...where Eve tasted her and Adam’s tomorrow, the woman of Maharawhenua tasted the yesterday within the tomorrow” (11). The woman became the wise storyteller of the land and turned the memories she had retrieved into stories that people listened to. One day, however, when they came to hear her, she had—in the manner of the mythic Daphne—vanished but in her place grew a tree with a single blossom. This blossom was named the Memory Flower.⁸ According to this legend, history is composed of memory and memory is a set of stories. A scientific discovery and a folkloric legend are *invented* to carry forward the narrative. These are not passive creations as part of the backdrop for the protagonists; rather, they actively and profoundly shape the characters and the plot. While the truth value of

⁸Mattina is similar to this woman from the legend. Mattina also gathers memories which she then “releases” to her husband and, subsequently, to her son. The woman in the legend disappears and a tree appears in her stead; Mattina’s death is her disappearance, and instead of an eternal bloom, we have John Henry’s immortal(izing) novel.

these constructs is to be taken for granted in the world of the novel, it provides the reader with three ontologically disparate worlds: Mattina's realist world of New York and Puamahara, the effects of the Gravity Star causing a collapse of binaries and human languages, and the hold of the legend of the memory flower (simultaneously perceived as gimmicky and profound)—pressing against each other and, as the novel progresses, interrupting each other as well. The co-existence of the ontological dominant through the metafictional mode and the different kinds of worlds juxtaposed and interrupting one another, and Mattina's epistemological quest for first-hand (and implicitly, for her, more reliable) knowledge and truth begs the question: is Mattina a postmodern character or a modern one caught in a postmodernist world? This paper argues that she is, indeed, anxious of her fate, her stories, and her quests, and thus betrays several anxieties when confronted with the postmodernist realities in her world.

A discussion of modernism that does justice to the literary period is beyond the scope of this paper. However, very briefly, postmodernism's concerns diverged greatly in some respects from modernism. The modernist literary imagination, seeking to provide structure to its fractured present,⁹ tended towards myths and traditions, while postmodernism's emphasis is on the notion of the construct of history and representation. While modernism sought to find new ways of representing reality in art, postmodernism claimed that there is no such reality that lies beyond representation itself. Modernism remains true to the finished art object, and does not put on display the artifice or the construction of art. Postmodernism, on the other hand, highlights the motivations underlying the status of an object and the modes of construction of the art object. While modernism is deeply disappointed with the real world and sees art as the source of civilizational salvation, postmodernism deliberates over the specific (cultural, social, political) contexts that make societies accept an object as art. Moreover, postmodernism treats art and language as simply cultural and social constructs that must be treated with liberal amounts of suspicion.

In line with the "incredulity towards metanarratives" such as History, Science, Marxism and so on (as outlined by Lyotard), Linda Hutcheon states that postmodernists operate from a "decentered" perspective, which facilitates the existence of multiple truths, realities, and worlds. In effect, in the postmodernist ethos, "historical plurality

⁹Peter Childs suggests that modernism "...tends to associate notions of the artist's freedom from realism, materialism, traditional genre and form, with notions of cultural apocalypse and disaster" (2). Frank Kermode also states that the moment of "crisis" and the constant "sense of an ending" are defining characteristics of modernism (93, 98).

replaces atemporal eternal essence” (58). Postmodernism also promotes the view that things lack inherent and overarching truth value that can be discovered by reaching back to some pristine origins. Truth, in fact, could be defined as whatever satisfies the rules of the discourse. Therefore, truths are plural, relative, transient, and only contextually relevant. Hutcheon states that there is no “transcendental, timeless meaning” out there (19). And yet, Mattina is precisely on the path to try and discover the truth of other people and places, to know these and record them.

The ontological dominant expects the readers to think of fiction as being beyond questions of true and false. Through the “ontological perspective,” readers see fictional worlds capable of violating the rules of logic. Characters and events can be outrageously transformed in an ontologically pluralist world. Positions become relative and unstable. The boundaries of fiction and the real world are rendered porous, and boundaries between the various kinds of fictional worlds (fantastical, real, historical) erode as they are nestled within one text. It is not uncommon to find these varied worlds intruding into the worlds of other texts. Both the matter and manner of construction are interrogated, and postmodernist novels lead us to question the nature of representation outside the world of the novel as well. Therefore, in a truly ontological imagination even social reality is seen as a loosely held collection of sub-universes of meanings, positions, roles, and discourses. Inevitably, the overtly constructed nature of fictional worlds leads us to question the construction of the “real” world as well (McHale 90). The germane inquiry is not whether truth obtains, but how truth is made, and for whom it is true.

In such a destabilized postmodernist world, the protagonist is on the modernist-epistemological quest to *know*, not *be*. At one point, Mattina bemoans that the people of Puamahara are “...stick figures, accepting as truth an habitual arrangement of words” (48). Mattina, thus, appears to believe that reality and truth somehow exist outside of language, and must be more than simply an arrangement of words. She also believes that she was spared the horrible fate the night of the Gravity Star because “...she had removed herself, her real being, to New York City, that is, to Memory,” and decides that in order for people to beat death “they must remain within the Memory Flower” (Frame 151). As a celebration of the privilege of memory, the novel, in a long flashback, takes the readers through Mattina’s life leading up to the moment of her arrival in Puamahara. However, while Mattina realizes that this power of memory is lost to those who experienced the deluge and the loss of language, even this epiphany is half-hearted and futile. While the novel emphasizes the role of language as the home of

memory (exemplified in the expunging of those that are robbed of language and therefore have no space in public memory), she is unable to accept her own ephemerality and existence in language. All her life, she has desired to witness and gather the “real essence” of things and beings, and to discover the core of language and memory (Zoppi 162). She accepts that “...most of her life had been spent on the trail of *really* and its parent noun” evidently without much success (Frame 48). Like a turn-of-the-century anthropologist, she wants to examine, interview, observe, record, and understand the people she meets on her voyages. From these, she wishes to build up a conclusive story. Moreover, she believes that she is well equipped to deal with the world as it has been presented to her given her status in society, wealth, and most of all, her access to knowledge, art, and language.

An urgency within her demanded that she ‘know’ how the rest of the world lived, how they felt, and behaved, what they said to one another, what they rejoiced in, despaired of, and dreamed about; and so whenever she travelled, she sought the company of the ‘natives’, listened to their stories...and often, recklessly, felt the satisfaction of giving cheques towards needs that could not recognise or be fed by money. (Frame 19)

However, when faced with the unprecedented and the extraordinary, Mattina’s knowledge of both the legend and the scientific discovery fails her. The primitive animal-ish presence in her room is beyond her linguistic limits, as is the new world (dis)order that the Gravity Star causes. When she returns to New York, she finds herself terribly unsure of how to articulate what really happened—not only because memory is fickle but also because the reality of that night is inexplicable in familiar idiom. Mattina is aware that her story is already lost on the night of the rain of alphabets. She says to herself: “If I were writing this story...the words might have begun already to burn, and though still legible they would sink into the flames as if they desired their own oblivion” (125). She is, therefore, a protagonist on a quest to know, but caught in a postmodernist world where several worlds and narrators jostle and interrupt each other, and where failed language implies an absence of memory and being. She is thwarted in her well-meaning attempts to know the “real” at every step—by the imposter novelist Dinny Wheatstone usurping her voice and supplanting her experience, by her death (i.e. surrendering her point of view), and finally by her own fictional status, as exposed in the preface and postscript by another fictional character, John Henry.

Janet Frame’s *The Carpathians*, is therefore, an exemplar of several postmodernist modes of fiction, most significantly of metafic-

tion. It uses competing and interrupting narrators and narrative levels to tell the story of the protagonist who fails in her quest to know, record, and articulate the observed truth. This fictional world is full of authors but also characters anxious about their existence and about being remembered. Characters are rendered as traces in language, and a catastrophic event serves to show that once people are robbed of language, they have no presence. The Memory Flower, a legend, suggests that memory itself lives only in stories, and thus in language. In highlighting the role of narratives and language, and in the unreliability of truth and points of view, the novel revels in the postmodernist dismantling of the distinction between reality and language, and also suggests the futility of the quest to *know*, rather than *be*.



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Image, Language, and Subjectivity in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*

Ananta Ahuja

“Let’s just say you’re not quite there” (qtd. in Samantha Ellis’ *Beckett’s Play at the Old Vic, April 7, 1964*), the Beckettian subject is often read along the lines of this response offered by the playwright to one of his famous actresses, Billy Whitelaw, on her enquiry about the relative nature of her character in *Footfalls*. Coming across as a hypothesis on the metaphysics of existence, the statement indicates towards a probable mode of being. It foregrounds a possibility in light of which a person can be said to be existing. While the remark can be thought of as negating presence to suggest an absence, it can also be read as one pointing at a lack that prevents a certain ‘fullness’ of the presence. Thereby, allowing for an investigation into the manner and the nature of existence.

The stated theoretical approach can be metamorphosed to bring into account the idea of representation in *Krapp’s Last Tape*. What does one mean by representation and how does the notion manifest itself in the text? These are some of the questions that arise as one reads the play. This paper deals with the ideas by directing its attention towards the constitution of the text. In its length, *Krapp’s Last Tape* presents the protagonist Krapp, his dialogues, the utterances of the tape, and an abundance of stage directions. Since the play is a performance meant to be staged, the directions occupy a large part of the text. However, it is not the concern of this paper to deal with the technicalities of the interplay of textual and performative attribute but to study the language and images which effectively guide the reading process. While the conception of the character cannot be completely divorced from an engagement with the conceptual dimensions of theatrical experience, the paper intends to restrict its focus on the various parameters that the reading of such a text readily involve. The concern of the paper is to read the Beckettian subject along the lines of the concepts like image, language, and subjectivity. Neither of these three aspects exist in complete isolation in regard to the text. *Krapp’s Last Tape* is, more than anything, a series of images presented through language. In its function, the image goes beyond language and the suppression that the latter causes. It makes visible and tangible that which is abstract and abstruse. The Beckettian subject expresses itself in and through image. Therefore, it is image and not language which explains the subjectivity of a character like Krapp.

Before encountering Krapp's own utterances, the readers are provided with a description of the setting leading to an elaborate account of the protagonist's demeanor. The play begins on "A late evening in the future" presenting Krapp in an undersized "rusty black narrow trousers" and a "surprising pair of dirty white boots" (Beckett 9). He is characterized as one who is "hard of hearing," short-sighted but unspectacled. He has "disordered grey hair" and a "cracked voice"¹ (9–10). On his each birthday, he habitually records and listens to certain consciously taped events of his life. As the play opens he is found looking for a specific "Box three, spool five" (13). The spool that he plays informs us of a much younger Krapp "separating the grain from the husks" i.e. accumulating the "things worth having" when all the "dust has settled" (15).

To his readers, Krapp comes forth as a solitary figure, as one who appears incomplete because he lacks wholesomeness. He is too big for his trousers for they are unable to contain him adequately. His voice is not "strong" and "pompous" but rather "cracked." Figuratively, his condition is like that of his monologues for both are fragmented and disjuncted entities. His pauses, silence, and hesitation function like ellipsis in indicating occlusion and intentional suppression of thoughts, words, and ideas. The construction of the monologue as an incoherent narrative marked with multiple fragments and gaps comments on the way in which Krapp is presented in the play. The form is also suggestive of the manner in which the playwright consolidates Krapp's entire being by putting together selective fragments from his past which interact with his present so that neither his past nor the present self can be seen in isolation.

The concise directions enable the reader to construct Krapp in a particular manner. Each direction can be conceived as an image which does not simply facilitate comprehension by the process of association, like relating a word with a picture, but also helps us endow Krapp with consciousness and bring him to life in form of the mental image. The mental image, according to Sartre, is "the consciousness" of a thing as an image or "the imaginative consciousness" of the thing. Such a consciousness helps the reader to not only acknowledge the presence of the object but also enables him to perceive it in ways other than the

¹Note how the quotes urge the reader to visualize the words and see them as images of a kind. The mention of colours, expressions, and attributes stimulates a process of image-making in the reader's mind such that each image comes alive in the consciousness of the reader and enables the construction of the character within the mind of the reader. The shift from the words on page to the image in the consciousness is crucial to the idea of representation in the paper.

usual. In the process the reader constructs an ‘idea’ of Krapp. To have an idea of Krapp is to have him in one’s consciousness. The image, however, not only belongs to the consciousness but attains a consciousness of its own because Krapp is no more entailed within language or by the words on page but is contained in the interstitial spaces of silence and occlusions in the play.

We have indicated above that Krapp’s being is not holistically present in the materiality of language but in the immateriality of the ‘mental’ image (the image in the consciousness). It is because the mere presence of language takes away any possibility of there not being any substance in Krapp’s life. While the language harps on expression, it is the image which provides room for ‘expressionlessness.’ The latter allows the unusual and the inexplicable (namely stasis and silence) to exist and surface spontaneously. In her article entitled “Literatures Silence (Samuel Beckett Versus the Word),” Faena Aleph suggests that by resorting to silence, Beckett attempts to avoid “the vain proliferation of the word.” She states that for him “the word” is the “staunchest enemy.” Like many Post-War writers and artists, Beckett’s disbelief in language owes to the fact that language proves inadequate to convey the predicament of the modern man, his traumatic experiences and lack of substance in life. Therefore, the playwright uses images and incorporates the ‘visual’ to amplify abstraction and make the underlying absurdity visible to the reader’s eye.

In technical terms, an image emphatically asserts the presence of an object and functions as its symbol. It conveys the obvious denotation but in the process makes other denotations possible. To this effect, John Lutterbie writes in “Subjects of Silence” that “The image is resonant as the site of gestation, of creation and transformation” (Lutterbie 473). The image functions through non-relation and encourages new interpretations by which it transcends the function of the linguistic sign. All in all, an image is denotational, metaphorical, and referential in its expression (Goodman 95). In the essay, “Levels of Imagery and Visual Expression,” Vija B. Lusebrink traces the various levels through which a mental image progresses and delineates the visual expressions that each level entails.² The image culled out of language belongs to the “referential level” wherein it is “formed in response to concrete words” (Lusebrink 36). In the next stage the image conveys the “associative meaning” wherein it acts as a

²The sudden shift in the vocabulary from ‘image’ to ‘mental image’ in the given context is to convey that the latter has the quoted properties of the former even though it is conceived in the mind. What is crucial here are the levels of image processing and meaning making that are common to both.

counterpart for the linguistic sign. The third level, which is the level of cognitive function, is integral to the argument of the paper as it "...bring[s] out the abstract aspects of images representing the underlying structures" which may include "input from other modalities" (Lusebrink 36–7). The cognitive level is important because it suggests the possibility of new meanings and stands for a higher level of denotation that goes beyond linguistic description. As an illustration, consider Krapp's acts of brooding, peering, or "staring vacuously" while "remaining motionless." It is understandable that these acts are not just physical demonstrations but potential indicators of the condition of mind. Dan Zahavi rightly writes in the "Subjectivity and the First-Person Perspective" that "Expression is more than simply a bridge supposed to close the gap between inner mental states and eternal bodily behavior... Expressive behavior reveals the mind to us" (Zahavi 74). The reader is thus pushed to think what Krapp broods on, peers at, and is puzzled by, and why at all does he behave in an absurd manner.

On another level, these gestures problematize the understanding of the notions of temporality and subjectivity that feature in the play. In being designated as a symbol, the image is converted into a site of possibility and meaning making. Here, the image can be said to have the properties of "Secondness" suggested by Charles Sanders Peirce in his work on semiotics. As put by Laura U. Marks in her essay, "Signs of the Time: Deleuze, Peirce, and the Documentary Image":

Semiotics terms associated with Secondness are the sign itself, namely...the relation of the sign to its object, which is *indexical*, that is, the sign denotes the object through an existential connection to it; and how the interpreting represents the sign as a *dicisign*,³ a sign of possibility. It is [here]...that qualities become attributes of objects and events, which are perceived in their individuality and in opposition to everything else. This we might term the realm of the real. (Marks 197' emphasis in original)

While discussing the various levels of mental imagery previously, it has been mentioned that the visual expression has various levels where each level assumes a particular function in facilitating comprehension of meaning. There too, a trajectory had been traced from the

³'Dicisign,' a term used by Charles Sanders Peirce in his Semiotic Theory, is a sign which is not necessarily linguistic or linguistically structured but has the capability to function as a truth-bearer by itself.

denotative aspect of the image or the “indexical” attribute to the cognitive function which flourishes within and beyond the “sign of possibility.” Here, not only is the object attributed with definite qualities but is also put out to acquire layers through suggestion and implication.

In the play Krapp creates and recreates images. He “recalls” his past selves by imagining them. The images evoked through the spools are depicted in a certain fashion. There is “an old ledger” in which all the entries are catalogued. The specific entry of the box three spool five reads as following: “Mother at rest at last...The black ball...(He raises his head, stares blankly front. Puzzled.) Black ball?... (He peers again at ledger, reads) The dark nurse... (He raises his head, broods, peers again at ledger, reads)” (Beckett 13). The main tenets of the spool are written denotatively. The images that they point at—“the black ball” and “the dark nurse”—have for their referents, a ball black in colour and a nurse dark in complexion, seen by Krapp at some point in time. However, the indexical nature of the reference goes beyond the given context into a more complex sphere. The images are not mere referents here. The dramatic turning of “The black ball” into “Black ball?” marks a crucial displacement. It can be read as a parallel to the shift which highlights a break in the relation of sign and its referent. The transformation of an objective phrase into an expressive one invites an insight into the subjectivity of the character. The image of the black ball, even before the tape introduces it, is indicative in nature. The incoherent form of the quote restrains formulation of a proper context. Each phrase that translates into an image is decontextualized and gives rise to new connotations. For instance, the word ‘black’ and ‘dark’ disassociate themselves from ‘ball’ and ‘nurse,’ respectively, to imply darkness—a reference which might not directly relate with the words that follow but serve other purposes in the text.

Beckett extensively employs the imagery of light, darkness, and colors like black and white. One of the ideas to which these images relate to is the subjectivity of the character. The employment of light and darkness (especially in the movement of Krapp from his desk which is placed in light to the darkness of the backstage) and numerous other images like “Memorable equinox,” day-night, etc., add to the density of the play. It is noticeable that Krapp is more active in the dark where he “goes with all the speed” than in the light at his desk where he is, for the most part, listening to the tape and passively staring or brooding. The constant movement between the two spaces reflects the existential crisis that Krapp goes through. Charles R.

Lyons considers it to be a representation of "...a conflict between antithetical desires: to lose the self in darkness and to confront the self in the light" (Lyons 101). It is true that Krapp "...love[s] to get up and move about in it (darkness), then back here to...(hesitates)...me (pause) Krapp" (Beckett 15). While the imagery makes visible the dilemma of the modern man and his distancing from the self, it knits with itself the notions of time and temporality.

In *Phenomenology and the Future of Film, Rethinking Subjectivity beyond French Cinema*, Jenny Chamarette opines that "...the very possibility of thought is governed by an attentiveness towards, and a presence to, time. Presence to temporalities – to an event, a moment, a duration – is a precondition for sensation, experience, and knowledge..." (22). It suggests that subjective experiences cannot make sense if they are not aligned with respect to time and temporality. It informs that our "presence" needs to be always manifested in time. It can only have meaning when it is embedded in these notions. We are always subjected to time and yet there remains a scope for giving it a form because "Time is a condition of possibility for subjectivity, but subjectivity is also a condition of possibility for forms of time" (Chamarette 24). The linear flow of time, i.e. its movement from past to present and from present to future, can be altered through memory, imagination, dreams, hallucinations, etc. The subjective experiences enable us to decipher time and mold it. The "imagine[d]" events of the bygone year help Krapp in "...embarking on a new...retrospect" (Beckett 16). Since the internal domain of imagination is not governed by the linear flow of time, the events put together present neither a linearity of occurrence nor a proper context. Nonetheless, they are a part of Krapp's retrospect which help him take on new prospects. Interestingly, majority of the events are recorded in the present tense, so that even though they belong to the past they assume a character of being present in the present of the protagonist. Krapp's act of listening to the spools of tape has often been read as a search for self. Though the present Krapp has nothing substantial to record from his recent past, he wants to "Be again," that is, be the self he once was. The revocation of the past is a conscious act springing from the realization that the present as well as the present self no longer hold significance.

Time, one of the notable images which materializes in the length of the play, not only gives shape to Krapp's existence but arrests the very existence that it sets out to frame. It makes itself tangible in form of the tapes. The episodes that the tapes present trace the movement of the subject in time and space. That the recordings

have a significance for the speaker is clear from the grain-husk metaphor. They are meant to enable Krapp to move forward in life. However, instead of witnessing any progression through them, he encounters absolute stasis. The little movement that does happen hurries itself into a state of suspension. So, the events on the tapes which were meant to stimulate the thought process and help Krapp to embark on a new beginning lead him instead to an end marked by the failure of being unable to record anything substantial about his life.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes with regard to temporality in *Phenomenology of Perception* that it is “the present” which “...enjoys a privilege because it is a zone in which being and consciousness coincide” (423–4). He further states that the “act of representation, unlike the experiences represented, is actual[ly] present” (492). He also states that “each present, in virtue of its very essence as a present, rules out the juxtaposition of other presents” and a certain period of the past can only be unfolded “anew according to its own *tempo*” (491). In the context of the play, the images of a certain present in the past do not and *cannot* have the same significance for the Krapp in the present. The present which has turned into past cannot be said to essentially have the same “tempo” when evoked to replace a present moment in the future (for it is “A late evening in the future”). That which is present to Krapp is the “act of representation” of the bygone moment, the moment itself cannot become the present. Since both our being and consciousness are subject to time, the unity of the two in the present-turned-past cannot exactly repeat itself in a given present in future. To Krapp, this unity can only be accessible as a representation of experiences in form of memory. Therefore, his endeavor to “Be again” can never be successful (Beckett 26). He can relive those experiences only by recalling them through the documented memory. The more he tries to belong to his previous self and events of life, the more distanced he finds himself from them. One of the reasons of Krapp turning silent also stems from the inability to connect and control time in a desirable way.

A phrase in the text which demonstrates the phenomenological condition of a person caught in the “ceaseless flux” (Chamarette 24) of time and one that brings the notions of temporality and subjectivity together is “Being--or remaining?” (Beckett 18). Krapp finds the string of words while looking for the meaning of the word “viduity” in the dictionary. The readers notice that he repeats the phrase in the form of a question and the two hyphens between “Being” and “or” adds to the effectivity of the phrase, compelling us to question “Being” and render emphasis to “remaining” instead. Both the words are significant

because they put the three temporal denotations—that of past, present, and future—on the same plane. ‘Being’ as a verb is a condition of unfolding of existence. It implies duration. It is a process where present and future need to immediately and necessarily give way to past and present, respectively. Yet, for the meaning of the word to be conveyed, the three have to be seen existing together. Similarly, “remaining” is suggestive of that which is left of the whole, of the past which contains its larger segment, of the present and future in which the remaining *is* dissolving itself. However, the difference between the two is that while the former anticipates “prospection” of future, the latter brings retrospection in picture. Moreover, the two are inextricably related to one another for ‘Being’ is the present of all that has remained of the self but remaining is also the future of what the self is yet to become.

Similar to the case above, the expressions like “staring vacuously,” peering, etc., are implicitly connected with the idea of time and temporality. Motionlessness in the dynamics of the play is understood against the flow of time though stillness makes comprehension of the passage of time difficult. When we say that time necessarily brings about change, we intend to suggest that it is through change that time can be made sense of. Stillness is one of the conditions which does not make change visible. That is to say, that though the body necessarily experiences change and is affected by it, the change does not become obvious. By large, there emerges a case wherein the past, present, and future come together to exist with one another to cause stasis. The simultaneity of the three in the play is also reflected in the manner in which time engulfs Krapp into itself.⁴ At no moment in the play is Krapp mastering time. He is subjected to it and is unable to transcend its bounds.

The ‘being’ and becoming of the subject constantly happens despite the stasis indicated above. Krapp, in the play, is observed to be communicating with his past. ‘Communicating’ because he does not simply listen to the recording, he reacts to them. For instance, he denies a familiarity with his younger self. He constantly pauses the tape at will and rewinds it to the section he finds fascinating. One notices that the events which were important to him in the past do not make sense to him in the present. The altering of his perspectives are markers of change. It is this very change, the consequence of time, which differentiates the irreducible and ephemeral unity of being and consciousness of a particular present from another moment in time. In the process of being and becoming, the stasis in the play cannot be

⁴The tape and the watch are signifiers of time in the play.

equated to absolute stillness or death. At the same time death cannot be considered completely absent from the grounds of the text since, as Derrida suggests, to put a subject into language is to repress knowledge about it.⁵

It is in the image that the Beckettian subject comes to life. The reader understands the subjectivity of the character better through the lens of the image. By decoding the images that draw within their ambit the complex ideas of time and timelessness, one explores the language of silence and stasis which transcend the language of words and speech. Each pause in the play is figuratively a liminal space between expression and suppression which has a language and a duration of its own. If the pause makes time evident, it also seeks to arrest it; if it denotes the absence of word, it simultaneously reveals the presence of thought. It is indeed in spaces like these that one locates the Beckettian subject and it is due to the affectivity of image that such locations are made accessible.



⁵To reiterate, the paper employs the concept of image precisely to counter the repression caused by language and make visible that which the language hides.

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‘There’s a Special Kind of Monster that is a Woman’: Locating Female Subjectivity in the Narrative of the Monstrous Murderess in Netflix’s *Alias Grace*

Nikita Gloria Pinto

In a 2018 interview with the *Irish Independent*, Amanda Knox, the infamous and wrongfully convicted killer in the 2007 murder of Meredith Kercher, commented on her gendered vilification by the public, “All wrongfully convicted people are portrayed as monsters but there’s a special kind of monster that is a woman.” This tendency to depict criminal women as monsters invoking the abject (Kristeva) in public discourse is not a new phenomenon but is, as shall be seen in the course of this paper, reiterated throughout the history of womanhood.

Without taking their innocence or guilt into consideration, it is important to note that the portrayal of these criminal women, according to Belinda Morrissey in *When Women Kill*, influence the “cultural conceptions of the feminine and female agency.” When women are accused and even convicted of “inhuman acts,” representations of these cases by hegemonic discourses of the media and law have a “vital role in maintaining notions of feminine evil” pertinent to the whole of womankind (7). In the examination of the representation of such transgressive women, it is evident that Victorian notions of violence, sexuality, and criminality persist even today.

The Victorian ideologies¹ regarding gender and violence are polarizing when women are positioned either as passive victims or villainous perpetrators. In other words, contemporary discourses tend to construct their narratives of (violent) women around nineteenth-century conceptions of the angel/whore dichotomy, presenting women as either non-agents or ‘bad’ and ‘mad’ women². This paper intends to trace the ways in which the problematic conceptions of gender, as outlined above, inform the Netflix television series *Alias Grace* (2017), an adaptation of Margaret Atwood’s partly fictional 1996 novel of the

¹The Victorian notions that typify (criminal) women as either victims or villains can be found in detail in Yvonne Jewkes’ criminological study *Media and Crime* (2004). Jewkes examines how modern media portrayals of criminal women are “embedded” in a Victorian framework which promotes “appropriate womanhood.” She identifies eight tropes built around such Victorian ideas used by the media in their narratives of offending women (107–38).

²Morrissey makes note of the media’s tendency to cast women convicted of murder as being inherently wicked and evil i.e. ‘bad’ or mentally ill i.e. ‘mad.’

same name. Set in 1843 Canada, the series probes into the real-life account of “celebrated murderess” and servant Grace Marks who was convicted, at the age of sixteen, for the murders of her employer, Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper, Nancy Montgomery.

The paper will also make brief references to the case of Amanda Knox as documented in the 2016 Netflix documentary *Amanda Knox*. Knox, a 20-year-old American college student in Italy, was wrongfully convicted of brutally murdering her roommate, Meredith Kercher, in 2007 in an alleged “drug-fuelled sex game” gone wrong. Established as an equally sensational and polarizing case, Knox’s uninhibited sexuality was treated as irrefutable proof of her criminality by the courtroom and the media who whipped up a frenzy of moral panic across conservative Italy. The paper attempts to use Knox’s case as a supplement to the case of Grace Marks, which is the subject of this paper, in order to foreground how nineteenth-century conceptions of femininity and sexuality continue to inform contemporary representations of (criminal) women like Amanda Knox.

At the time, Grace’s crime generated polarizing views among journalists, lawyers and the public who debated whether she was a femme fatale or an unwilling victim coerced by her accomplice and fellow servant, James McDermott. These polarizing views and projections not only “...reflected the contemporary ambiguity about the nature of women” (Atwood 463) but also exposed how Grace’s character was heavily constructed by patriarchal discourses to suit narratives supporting either her innocence or guilt. Morrissey notes that the “first activity” undertaken by legal and media discourses while approaching cases of women convicted for murder is to “construct a subjectivity for the protagonist” which is established through the usage of narratives (3).

However, discourses such as the ones originating from the media, law, and medicine produce “...stock stories³ of subjectivity which act as constitutive models for individual narratives of subjectivity.” In the gendered construction of stock stories, Morrissey contends that these kind of narratives establish “performatives” such as the black widow, whore, witch, evil mother, angel, etc (7). Furthermore, these essentialized and monolithic “performatives” come into conflict with the multiple subjectivities of the individual self. Grace, in particular, is subjected to these stock narratives throughout the course of her trial. In the series, she recounts how she was a cause of anxiety in the public

³Stock Stories are standard narratives and archetypes that are culturally based and targeted towards the general public.

discourse, labelled as an “inhuman female demon” by some, while others characterized her as a “good girl.”⁴ Since these stock portrayals of Grace lack agency, Atwood revises her account in *Alias Grace* through a feminist lens to disrupt the historical legitimacy and male hegemony that inform such narratives.

Atwood’s gynocentric narrative primarily functions as a metanarrative where the female criminal is contextualized and represented “...as a product of her social and cultural milieu” (Morrissey 21). Without contextualization of their crimes, female criminals are reduced to second-class citizens who “lack construction as fully human subjects,” that is, women, unlike men, are judged differently with respect to their violent acts. Morrissey observes that male violence is “actualized,” “frequently articulated,” and even “glorified” (17). However, when women kill, questions of evil nature⁵ and rationality surface along with the presentation of the murderess as a “non-agent.”⁶ In *Alias Grace* Reformist sympathisers seek Grace’s (played by Sarah Gadon) release from imprisonment by bringing in Dr Simon Jordan (Edward Holcroft), an alienist, to interrogate her about the crime which she claims to have forgotten. Simon is brought in to assuage the belief that Grace is a hysteric, and her alleged insanity is hoped to guarantee her freedom from incarceration. These men who “...pleaded her youth, the weakness of her sex, and her supposed witlessness” (Atwood 463) attempt to control her narrative while foregrounding hysteria to justify the frailty of feminine reason.

By using hysteria and emphasizing on her passivity to construct their arguments, the sympathisers effectively disempower Grace as they erase her agentic capacity. Furthermore, speculations of supernatural possession, insanity, and dissociative identity disorder briefly hinted at in the series have the potential to deny female agency and

⁴Like Grace Marks, Amanda Knox was subjected to stock stories by the media, courtroom, and the public who characterized her as a “seductress,” “she-devil with an angel face,” and a “Man-eater.”

⁵Narratives of female criminals often lapse into a Lombrosian view of criminality where women are scrutinized for their appearance. Knox was subject to these flawed beliefs where her attractiveness and, in particular, her blue eyes typified her as a cold and detached femme fatale.

⁶Jewkes lists eight “standard narratives” of criminal women in the media such as ‘bad wives,’ ‘mythical monsters,’ and ‘non-agents.’ The narrative of the ‘non-agent’ renders the woman as a “...victim who is not responsible for her actions” (130). Similarly, Morrissey argues that victimization of the murderess insists on the “powerlessness of the oppressed” where “responsibility, culpability, agency, and often her rationality” is denied and can “reinforce the notion that female violence is unreal” (25). The Battered Woman Syndrome, for instance, can fall under the non-agentic category.

undermine the conception of Grace as an active human subject.⁷ Theories speculate whether Grace was possessed by the deceased Mary Whitney's spirit. The hypnosis conducted by Dr DuPont in front of the Spiritualist circle takes on the supernatural quality of a seance. When Grace speaks, one of the women present argues that she is "A spirit that has taken hold of Grace...[as the] the spirits speak through others, in a trance." Such an argument brings forth questions about the author of the action of murder, that is, whether Grace was in control of her actions in a state of possession. Grace's body is perceived to be separate from Mary's spirit and actions; she is treated as a victim of possession, and not the author of her actions. Bodily possession erases any culpability in the murders as the possessed Grace lacks agency over her actions. Similarly, if Grace suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), she is perceived by the sympathisers to lack agency over her actions as she is inhabited by another personality, Mary, who confesses to being the author of these actions of murder. During hypnosis, Grace speaks as Mary, "But Grace doesn't know, she's never known. They almost hanged her, that would have been wrong... She forgot to open the window, so I couldn't get out." Grace alias Mary refers to the superstition of opening a window to let the soul of a person free post-death. When Mary dies, Grace forgets to open a window to let her spirit out, leading others to speculate that Mary's trapped spirit took control of Grace in that moment. In both theories of DID and Spiritual possession, Grace's body and mind is perceived as being separate from Mary's spirit or personality. This is further supported by Dr DuPont who states that they are "two distinct personalities, which both coexist within the same body, and yet have different sets of memories altogether. They are, for all practical purposes, two entirely separate individuals." Since Grace is perceived to be harbouring another "individual" within herself, one that subjects Grace's body to her (Mary's) control, Grace can be perceived as innocent of murderer within this hypothetical framework. However, this paper argues that these theories used to explain Grace's behaviour can, in fact, be agentic. Grace operates within these strictures of insanity to subvert constructions about her identity and image, and finds agency in the process. Therefore, in the hierarchical relationship of patient/doctor, where Grace is treated as an object of analysis by Simon, Atwood presents her as a conscious subject who negotiates for power. To understand these negotiations and strategies of resistance against Simon's gaze, it is necessary to first contextualize Grace and her actions.

⁷The theory of spiritual possession functions similarly to the insanity defence where one is deemed unaccountable for one's actions. Moreover, mental illness was often misinterpreted as possession in the Victorian period where fascination with the occult was a common occurrence.

In *Women, Murder and Femininity*, Lizzie Seal interprets murder as a culturally symbolic act resulting in the revelation of chief anxieties about social change (19). Seal's cultural reading of crime applies to the Montgomery-Kinnear murders which raised issues of the insubordination of lower classes, normative notions of femininity, and even immigration.⁸ Similarly, Morrissey argues that murder in itself invokes the abject but when women in particular commit murder they become "the foci for evil" (24). Julia Kristeva notes that "the feminine is often aligned with the abject, the criminal" as the fear of women's power "...to generate life and to take it away, runs deep in male-dominated societies" (2). Moreover, female killers are treated as transgressive figures as they transgress beyond established boundaries for their gender and disrupt the male order. As transgressors, they occupy a liminal and ambivalent position making them "unfathomable" (Seal 18). The "unfathomable" murderess, therefore, functions as abjection as she resists being known, violates boundaries of normative femininity, and becomes the Othered deviant (Seal 18). The abject murderess, according to Seal, can "induce both horror and disgusted fascination" (18). Seal's reading of the murderess as abject explains the "celebrity" status conferred upon Grace and her fetishization by Dr Jordan, which will be examined later in this paper.

The vilification of the murderess as monster is another way of denying agency to women.⁹ Morrissey observes that vilification, or the turning of such offending women into 'monsters' in the public discourse, is a means of coping with the trauma of absolving society from any participation in their creation. These women "...embody an unusually detestable wickedness which is not found in either the institutions or other citizens of their society. Hence, these women become foci for evil" (24). She argues that although the murderess is considered to have acted, her agentic capacity is not as a human woman but a *monster* (25).

Grace is vilified precisely in this manner, and although her vilification provokes curiosity and fetishization that comes with being the abject, she is cast away from a society that refuses to acknowledge its part in her creation. In an interview at the *Toronto International Film Festival*, Sarah Polley, the screenwriter notes that *Alias Grace* is a case study of female anger that arises from a place of constant abuse—abuse that has its origins in the very society that seeks to ostracize her.

⁸Similarly, the murder of Meredith Kercher gives insight into the deeply-rooted misogyny and treatment of female sexuality in Italy.

⁹Morrissey argues that agency is denied through three techniques: vilification, mythification, and victimism.

In order to understand the genesis of Grace's anger, the show presents us with scenes of powerless female servants like Grace whose bodies and minds are under constant threat and surveillance by the men around them. The anger that builds up from the coalescing of various instances of oppression is embodied in the narrative of Grace's fellow servant and friend, Mary Whitney, whose name she later adopts as an alias during her time as a fugitive after the murders. Mary is exploited by her employer's son, who deceives her into sleeping with him under the pretext of them being engaged. When she reveals her pregnancy, he pays her five dollars and tells her to drown herself. Possessing limited options Mary resorts to a back-alley abortion which results in her death. When the women of the household become aware of her situation, they afford her no sympathy but instead declare her to be a "disgrace" and a "deceitful girl." This self-regulation of gender and policing of sexuality by the women of the household attests to their internalized oppression.

In her reading of Paul Benson's essay "Autonomy and Oppressive socialization," Diana Meyers writes in *Gender in the Mirror*, "oppressive socialisation...instils false beliefs which prevent people from discerning genuine reasons for acting" (15). While the women of the household are subjects of "oppressive socialization," Mary and Grace, on the other hand, present themselves as "autonomous people" who are "competent criticizers" of the system they inhabit by questioning these beliefs (Benson). However, this ability to competently criticize their society is not easily manifested as patriarchal cultures interfere with women's agentic skills by inflicting penalties for non-conforming behaviour while perpetuating their oppression. Grace has experienced this oppression on multiple levels: sexually by her father and later at the asylum where she is described in reports to have left in a "delicate condition." The exploitation of the female body persists not just with Grace but nearly all women depicted in the series. This mirroring of women's lives coupled with Grace's assumption of other female identities (alias Mary) illustrates how female bodies are easily substituted for one another.

After her mother's death, Grace takes up the responsibilities of a mother and looks after her younger siblings. When she leaves for work her younger sister takes on the same role. Later at the Kinnear household, when Nancy is pregnant, it is implied that Kinnear seeks to make Grace his mistress replacing Nancy. This aspect of disposable bodies is explicitly seen when Simon uses his landlady Mrs Humphrey as a substitute for Grace during sex. In the converging and mirroring of female personas and identities—during hypnosis, spiritual posses-

sion, the substitution of bodies, madness, and even quilting a thread of commonality of oppression emerges uniting women into a resisting collective of rage—the kind of rage that could provoke one to murder.

Alias Grace begins with a scene where Grace is looking into a mirror. Traditionally, the motif of a woman looking into a mirror is ubiquitous in art history, film, photography, and other visual mediums. However, there is a discrepancy in the manner in which men and women are depicted with mirrors in films. The man-with-mirror imagery often includes self-portraits where the man is portrayed as “...gaining self-knowledge by contemplating his specular self” (Meyers 107). On the other hand, women are “...supposed to depend on their mirrors to know who they are...women-with-mirror figurations...do not read as metaphors for introspection” (115). However, in *Alias Grace*, the director, Mary Harron, and screenwriter, Sarah Polley, subvert this trope by foregrounding Grace’s gaze instead of the gaze of the viewer and the male alienist Simon. By looking into a mirror and trying out various expressions in accordance with the projections people have thrust upon her, Grace manages to unsettle the viewer who is unable to deduce whether she is innocent or guilty:

I think of all the things that have been written about me; that I am an inhuman female demon (*glares*), that I am an innocent victim of a blackguard forced against my will (*scared*)... That I was too ignorant to know how to act and that to hang me would be judicial murder (*innocence*)... That I am a good girl with a pliable nature and no harm is told of me (*widens eyes and blinks in innocence*). That I am cunning and devious (*narrows eyes*). That I am soft in the head and little better than an idiot (*takes a deep breath, as if exhausted*)... and I wonder: how can I be all these different things at once. (*Alias Grace*)

This performance which she indulges in debilitates all the essentialist descriptions that may categorise her as either a victim or a villain. Moreover, her “performance” highlights the construction of her character and identity, foreshadowing her identity and narrative as ambiguous, fluid, unreliable, and ultimately unknowable to the viewers. Her performance is an act of resistance against the viewer who attempts to deduce the truth and later becomes a resistance against Jordan’s futile attempts at psychoanalysis to assess if she is insane or ‘evil.’

She presents herself as being extremely perceptive and her awareness proves that she is not naïve or ignorant as declared by others. She knows that she is brought to the Governor’s house regularly

under the pretext of doing work but is actually an “object of curiosity” for the women of the Spiritualist circle. Grace is a thinking subject who is aware of the categorizations that the people around her use to confine her. When she is called a “celebrated murderess” she logically deconstructs this label by questioning “what is there to celebrate about a murder?” Moreover, by questioning the Spiritualist circle’s absurd need to celebrate murder she turns their gaze back upon them highlighting their perverse interests while countering their assumption of her as a perverse individual. She also exposes their lack of shame in deriving pleasure from the spectacle of a murder and the delight they take in perceiving her misery as justice for her “sin.” Her interactions with Simon and Jamie Walsh (her future husband) testify to her treatment as a spectacle by the men around her who use her painful account not just for voyeurism and pleasure, but also, in the case of Simon, to further his career. She writes in her letter to Simon, “He [Jamie] likes to picture the sufferings I have endured...You were as eager as Mr Walsh to hear about my sufferings in life.” This voyeuristic aspect that both men share testifies to the pleasure they derive from hearing her suffering, treating her as a fetishized object while also presenting themselves as heroes in her narrative who have rescued her from her miserable situation. Her lawyer shares this view comparing her to Scheherazade¹⁰ who seeks to “amuse” the Sultan. The misogyny that informs such views where men present themselves as saviours or sovereigns who arbitrarily determine the authenticity of Grace’s version of events continues even when she displays her intellect. As a thinking woman, Grace poses a threat and must be contained.

Building on Freudian psychoanalytic theory of castration anxiety, Laura Mulvey posits that the “woman as icon” always threatens to evoke (castration) anxiety. The “male unconscious” therefore attempts to investigate the female figure and “demystify her mystery” by turning “...the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous” (438). The tendency to turn the dangerous female into a reassuring fetish is seen when Grace questions the Biblical authenticity behind the painting of *Susanna and the Elders*. Grace’s knowledge, while a source of fascination for Kinnear, positions her as a dangerous female, one who is capable of challenging him and his ideas. Therefore, in order to contain the threat that she presents to his masculinity, he objectifies her several times over the course of the television series. At times, his fetishization and objectification of her is more overt, such as using a telescope to fixate his gaze upon her. In another instance, while she is cleaning the floor, the cam-

¹⁰The female storyteller from *One Thousand and One Nights* who tells a story every day to the Sultan in order for him to spare her life.

era takes on his voyeuristic gaze which fixates on her exposed legs and posterior, turning Grace into an erotic object. Sometimes, his tendency to objectify her as a means of minimizing the threat¹¹ that she embodies is more covert, as seen in the instance with the painting of *Susanna and the Elders*.

Thomas Kinnear is fascinated by Grace's curiosity and knowledge, and condescendingly jokes that she is the "...most learned maid-servant... I will have to put on a display like the mathematical pig in Toronto" (*Alias Grace*). By being compared to the "mathematical pig" she is not only treated as an object of curiosity but is also positioned as something absurd and unnatural, giving the implication that female intellectuality is a mythical construct. The comparison alludes to the exhibitionist role of women who "...are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey 436). This fetishization by Kinnear is significant when placed in the context of the painting which depicts Susanna being subjected to the lecherous gaze of two men as she bathes in the garden. When she rejects their demand for sexual favours, it provokes a false accusation of promiscuity by the men who seek her imprisonment and death for her non-compliance. This is also true of Grace who is abused by the men around her including Jeremiah whose generosity towards Grace masks his underlying ambition. Therefore, women in patriarchal cultures stand as "...signifier[s] for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker of meaning" (Mulvey 433). Since she is the "bearer" of meaning, her female sexuality repeatedly imposed upon by men for their interests, Grace must resist by fashioning an identity and a narrative that is unknowable to the male Other. This resistant identity and narrative which emerges in her therapy sessions with Simon is not immediately manifested, or articulated, for Grace finds the very opportunity to speak as being "difficult." However, she soon takes advantage of the opportunity presented to her to tell her story and foreground her subjectivity. It is important to note that this opportunity to speak is brought about by a masculine subject who chooses to interview her at the request of her sympathisers. She is heard and represented through the intervention of Simon who represents the masculine authority of medical institutions.

¹¹Turning the "dangerous female" into a fetish is just one of the many means of limiting female subjectivity. The infantilization of women, a tendency subverted by Grace in her interactions with Simon, is also another means of "reassuring" the male unconscious.

While the veracity of her words is dependent on the belief of a male listener, she slowly manages to avoid being constructed by his encumbering gaze by adopting covert and subliminal strategies of observation, deflection, and manipulation. Grace is aware of how her previous attempts to speak were manipulated. So, she omits some details while deliberately staying evasive in her interactions with Simon. Here, knowledge is power and Grace has monopoly over it by refusing to share it with Simon: “just because you *pestered* me to tell you everything, there’s no reason to tell you.” Her usage of the word “pestered” alludes to her position of power where Simon is reduced to an annoying pest that will not be indulged. Later, when Simon asks her to describe her daily schedule, she is appalled by his evident lack of knowledge of the domestic sphere. She alerts him of the privileged position that he occupies: “men such as yourself do not have to clean up the messes you make...you are like children.” She, in this way, turns back his paternalistic gaze upon him by infantilizing Simon and other men with his privilege, exposing their dependence on women.

Although she is his patient, subject to examination, unbeknownst to Simon he is the one being observed, scrutinised, and manipulated by Grace. Her scrutinization of him is evident when Simon looks more distraught with every interview and is caught off-guard when she says, “I wonder what is causing your lack of sleep?” observing that he was “...getting thinner...prey to some nagging sorrow.” Simon is further positioned as being vulnerable in Grace’s presence as she learns personal things about him without his knowledge. She assumes a position of power as she grows more resilient while Simon loses confidence in his ability as a doctor. With each interview, Simon loses any semblance of power that he assumed in the therapist/patient relationship. Conversely Grace, who traditionally is the powerless subject under the therapist’s gaze, moves to a state of power by withholding the knowledge that Simon desperately seeks even though she is acutely aware of what he desires: “It is knowledge of me you crave, Doctor, forbidden knowledge...you want to open up my body and peer inside. In your hand, you want to hold my beating female heart.” When Simon presents her with an apple and other such objects in an attempt at Freudian free association, she stays evasive, aware of his intentions to gain an insight into her mind. By withholding her opinions and thoughts from him, she deliberately resists: “He wishes to go home and say to himself: ‘I stuck in my thumb and pulled out a plum. What a good boy am I.’ But I will not be anybody’s plum.” As much as Grace wishes to narrate her story, she refuses to comply with his treatment of her as some trophy to be won, some plum, the archetypal fruit of knowledge that would emerge in his understanding and, conse-

quently, gain mastery of her mind and body. Her insistence on ambiguity as seen in her multiple narratives, gaps in her memory, and withholding of information restore some control to her life.

Simon's changing feelings towards Grace, from paternal to increasingly erotic, demonstrate how his sympathy mutates into an erotic fixation resulting in counter-transference which Grace cleverly exploits. His erotic dreams about embracing a half-dressed Grace while repeatedly whispering "murderess, murderess" indicate that her status as "murderess" is fetishized by him. Simon, as we see later, is still haunted by the memory of Grace and his inability to resolve his feelings for her subjects him to a "nervous exhaustion."

Instead of engaging in a traditional form of communication that exudes male hegemony, Grace appropriates the feminine discourse of quilting to tell her story. The quilt metaphor is not only an effective means of (re)conceptualizing history from a female point of view but it also functions as a device of concealing knowledge from men (Michael 426). While Grace is meant to be confessing the truth in her sessions with Simon, we see her instead engaged in quilting. Quilting may seem like an innocuous activity, but Grace appropriates it to narrate her truth which is unreadable and unknowable to Simon. By appropriating quilting as a tool for storytelling, she finds agency in the construction of her narrative.¹² She subtly alters these quilts to suit her ideas. After her exoneration, she makes a quilt for herself based on the Tree of Paradise pattern but includes a border of snakes and three triangles to the pattern. Each triangle is of symbolic value to Grace as she adds a red piece taken from her first menstruation petticoat lent to her by her best friend Mary Whitney, a faded-yellow piece from her penitentiary dress, and a pink piece from Nancy's dress that Grace wore during her trial. In this manner, she stitches together pieces of clothing that represent important events and people in her life, thereby constructing an alternative discourse. This discourse is inclusive of all the three women, all of whom are written out or misrepresented in traditional male narratives due to their gender and class. Conscious of the struggles of women like her, Grace transposes this perpetual battle for power onto her quilts, making it a discourse of the Othered: "...women have chosen to sew such flags, and then to lay them on the tops of

¹²These means of constructing subjectivity through private narratives, if exposed, can also become tools to further characterize women and take away their autonomy. For instance, Knox kept a private diary in prison but it was leaked to the press and with it, salacious details of all her sexual partners became public knowledge, further vilifying her in the public eye.

beds...for a warning.” By referring to the quilts as flags and “warning” signals, she likens them to an army displaying their flags before going out to war, painting them as rebels.

Madness, like quilting, can be an effective instrument of rebellion. Grace’s supposed madness is manifested when she is hypnotised by Dr DuPont. During hypnosis, Grace is able to unleash everything that she thinks, articulating her anger and presenting herself as a woman with desire when she speaks through her alter-self, Mary. By assuming Mary’s persona, she exposes Simon’s fantasies about her and acts as his interrogator, “...you want to know if I kissed him, if I slept with him...whether I did what you’d like to do.” Her “madness” is a subversive tool of resistance against Simon’s desire to know and analyse her. Furthermore, her apparent madness becomes a site of power as it absolves her of the murders and, therefore, warrants her exoneration under an insanity defence. Madness, like storytelling, serves as her means of escaping incarceration. Going by this reading, it can be deduced that Grace’s hysteria may be a response in provocation to the Spiritualist circle who are aroused by her “celebrated” status. Her performance of madness during hypnosis can be read as a means of manipulation to secure her release. Hysteria, according to feminists like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, is perceived to be a frustrated response to an oppressive patriarchal culture that seeks to silence women. They argue that diseases such as hysteria are “caused by patriarchal socialization” where women from a young age are trained in the ideas of “docility,” “submissiveness,” and “renunciation” (295). Their argument is supported by Simon himself after Grace’s alter-self has been revealed during hypnosis:

I wonder if they (hypnotists) provide an opportunity for women to say what they think, and to express their true thoughts and feelings more boldly, and in more vulgar terms than they could otherwise feel permission to. I wonder about Grace’s violent childhood and her experience as a young woman.... I wonder how much repressed rage she must have carried with her as a result.

His acknowledgement of her “repressed rage,” originating due to patriarchal socialization and her violent experiences as a woman, creates a space for empathy. By taking her anger into account and the trauma that could have provoked her to murder, Simon deconstructs the monstrous labels assigned to her. This realization of his emerges after her hypnotization, which, as he recognizes, is empowering for women.

It can also be theorized that Grace has Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). Her split self demonstrates the indeterminacy that characterises her identity, which can neither be ascertained by Simon nor by the viewer. Her multiplicity is, therefore, wielded as an instrument of resistance against the viewer's attempts to define her. However, if she really does suffer from multiple personality disorder or some form of mental illness, Grace requires actual help. Even though her conviction as a hysteric may ultimately afford her freedom, it licenses her subjection to more constraints and torture at the asylum. Fiona Tolan observes this paradox regarding the empowering/disempowering dichotomy within madness for Grace in *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, "A schism appears between the empowering feminist concept of the hysteric as a voice of rebellion, and the contradictory reality of hysteria as a confirmation of masculine assumptions of feminine intellectual frailty" (238). This paradox contributes to the ambiguity surrounding Grace and her narrative(s). The series does not seek to provide answers or certainties regarding Grace's insanity and culpability. Even if Grace is insane, she presents herself as being acutely aware of the power it affords her and takes advantage of it. In this manner, Grace (taken to be sane or insane; guilty or innocent) resists against perception and the desire for closure by preserving the enigma that defines her identity and narrative(s).

The case study of Grace Marks demonstrates how patriarchal discourses of law and media can be limiting in their representation of women (who are convicted for murder, in particular) as victims or villains. Since these discourses are ineffective in the construction of a subjectivity that is actually representative of women, Atwood counters them by foregrounding the voice of her protagonist herself. As Morrissey notes, revisionist works by feminists provide agentic representations of women convicted of murder. They humanize and contextualize "...the murderess as anarchist or as iconoclast, forcing the media and law to cope with her outsider status" (29). In this sense, Grace can be read as an iconoclast, a criticizer of the society she inhabits, whose narratives of ambiguity serve as a means of emancipating herself from the confining space of the monstrous murderess.



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Shame and the Failure of Recognition in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

Siddhant Datta

What I shrink from, I believe, is the shame of dying as stupid and befuddled as I am.

J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty sees shame as a dialectic between the self and the other, as that of the master and slave. In so far as one has a body, Merleau-Ponty argues, s/he may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person. To regain the status as a subject, one has to seek recognition within the dialectic (Merleau-Ponty 193). This paper follows Merleau-Ponty's insight into the reduction of the self to an object in the gaze of the other and draws upon this insight to read interruptions to the colonial epistemological projects that attempt to construct the other as an object of knowledge. Neocolonialism's implication in a regime that repeatedly constitutes its other within its own terms of legibility stresses its similarities to its predecessor and a continuation of its practices of epistemological violence on its other.¹ The success of decolonisation has been hampered by an uninterrupted production of marginalisation of the other within post-colonial democracies with a mere shifting of sites of domination.

This paper intends to argue for a place that shame may occupy in disrupting the neocolonial project today. Nirmal's diary from Amitav's Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* is an instructive text to study the invocations of neocolonial shame. Timothy Bewes has argued for the ontological inseparability of shame from the forms it occurs in, which is suggestive of how we may approach Nirmal's decision to write the diary as precisely such an instance of writing steeped in the experience of shame (Bewes 39). The possibility of a recovery from this ontological inseparability in shame within the framework of the Hegelian dialectic that Merleau-Ponty envisions by the recovery of subjectivity though is not as straightforward as he may imagine. A closer look at the universalising tendency at the heart of Hegel's framework faces additional barriers to recognition and elides the very possibility of the

¹This paper's critique of neocolonial shame draws on Gayatri Spivak's formulation of 'neocolonialism' as the transition from old territorial imperialism to the rise of monopoly industrial capitalism. See *Neocolonialism*, edited Robert Young, *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991).

recognition of difference and the viability of the subject as imagined by Hegel and Merleau-Ponty in the neo-colonial setting. Drawing on Jacques Lacan's reworking of desire in Hegel and Foucault's reworking of the dialectic as a model for historical change, this paper attempts to dwell on the failure of shame as a model for change at the inter-subjective level and looks to explore where instead we may locate the potential for corrective actions in shame.

Before proceeding on to the appearance of shame, it is necessary to account for what inhibits its appearance in the first place. Hannah Arendt argues that the imperial project in Africa was a precursor, and later formed a constitutive element, of totalitarian regimes in Europe (Arendt 207). Arendt isolates the instrument of bureaucracy in the colonies of India and Egypt, and the role it played in engendering a sense of "aloofness" in the administrator. This attitude is characterised by her as a belief in the superiority of European existence on a higher plane of civilisation. Relying on accounts of Cecil Rhodes and Lord Cromer, Arendt brings out how the administrator remained insulated from responsibility to recognise the suffering of those he governed. A shared space (on which Hegel premises his dialectic) between the administrator and the subjects is denied, with the Empire serving as the mediating link, thwarting recognition. Due to such an attitude of aloofness, the representation of the other remained compromised within the ideology and interests of the Empire.

In Ghosh's text, Nirmal is introduced as a Marxist who quits life in Calcutta due to his involvement in politics and health concerns. Nirmal and his wife Nilima move to Lusibari in the Sunderbans, founded by an Englishman as a utopian project free from considerations of caste and religion. Nirmal's and Nilima's first reaction on their arrival at the settlement is one of shock. Nothing appears familiar to them:

How was it possible that these islands were a mere sixty miles from home and yet so little was known about them? How was it possible that people spoke so much about the immemorial traditions of village India and yet no one knew about this other world, where it was impossible to tell who was who, and what the inhabitants' castes and religions and beliefs were? (79)

They are confronted here with an incommensurability in the understanding of the world they inhabit. The markers of civilisation, the comfort of familiar signs of currency and banks do not greet them. What greets them instead is a feeling of strangeness. Nirmal returns to Lenin's pamphlet, reading it over and over again to deal with the tide

of unfamiliarity. It is a retreat to the familiar, a commitment to the sufficiency of the self, to overcome his crisis.

As Hegel journeys from self-certainty to the subject in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he shows the subject's inability to satisfactorily comprehend an object 'immediately' in a practical relation. This practical attempt takes the shape of desire, where:

Certain of the nothingness of this other, it explicitly affirms that this nothingness is for it the truth of the other; it destroys the independent object and thereby gives itself the certainty of itself as a true certainty, a certainty which has become explicit for self-consciousness itself in an objective manner. (Hegel 109)

The aloof subject similarly would willingly assert its own individuality and negate the world around it, and in the process only finds himself further absorbed in the enterprise. An endless chain of objects is negated; as a consequence, the object and desire need to be produced again. Nirmal, early in the narrative, stands apart from Nilima in his perception of the alterity in Lusibari. While Nilima views the population of widowed women on the island as a collective whose problems could be solved by a collective action as a 'class,' he believes otherwise. "Workers were a class, he said, but to speak of workers' widows as a class was to introduce a false and unsustainable division" (80).

In the course of writing the diary, Nirmal enacts dogmatic refusals and continually misrepresents the settlements. In reading Nirmal's diary, Gayatri Spivak's suggestion of the figure of the "native informant" is instructive in reading a denial of agency and voice to the other by the self-absorbed colonist. She borrows the term 'foreclosure' from Laplanche and Pontalis, and their tracing of the development of the term from Freud to Lacan: "[t]he sense brought to the fore by Lacan,...[is to be found] for instance, in [what] Freud writes...[about] "a much more energetic and successful kind of defence. Here, the ego rejects [*verwilft*] the incompatible idea *together with the affect* and behaves as if the idea has never occurred to the ego at all"" (Spivak 4). Where Spivak argues that the rejection of an affect can lead us from psychoanalytic speculation as a practical science towards ethical responsibility, this paper follows her by reading the appearance of shame as precisely such an affect that raises the possibility of a disruption. Spivak echoes Freud here who writes in *The Un-Ease of Civilisation* that this rejection of affect served and serves as the energetic and successful defence of the civilising mission. Shame's disruptive potential in the postcolonial setting is brought out with its in-

terruption of the civilising mission and an interrupted interpellation of the colonial subject.

How then is the appearance of shame to be understood on the site of the encounter between the self and the other? Shame often appears on the scene even before we are aware of the ‘norm’ within a particular social value system. It emerges as an experience prior to one’s learning of social standards but remains open to being moulded by social influences exerted upon it.² Discussions of shame in Derrida³ and Merleau-Ponty fixate on the image of the naked body, underlying which is an experience of being uncovered and exposed. For Levinas too, this idea of unwelcome exposure remains central:

Shame arises each time we are unable to make others forget our basic nudity. It is related to everything we would like to hide and that we cannot bury or cover up... What appears in shame is...precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radically impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself. (Levinas 64)

For Bewes, shame is an experience of incommensurability between the “I” as experienced by the self and the self as it appears reflected in the eyes of the other (Bewes 24). Drawing on Sartre, Bewes views it as a paradoxical structure which, despite its intense focus on the self, is always experienced before the “Other.” For Sartre, it is through the other as subject that my being gets its “object-state”:

I am conscious of myself as escaping myself not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other.

Shame is a unitary apprehension with three dimensions: ‘I am ashamed of *myself* before the *Other*.’ If any one of these dimensions disappears, the shame disappears as well. (Sartre 290)

What is intended to be drawn out from these analyses is a sense of *ex-*

²Martha Nussbamm has argued that shame appears on the scene even before we are aware of the norm within a particular social value system. Shame for her is fundamentally a concern between the tension between our aspirations and ideals, against our awareness of the helplessness of the other. See Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*. Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 173–216.

³See Jacques Derrida “The Animal That Therefore I Am” trans. David Wills in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 2.

posure in front of the other, the feeling of being *fixed* by the gaze of the other and shame as an affect that is predominantly centred on the body.⁴ For the self to accord importance to the gaze of the other and to overcome the ego's denial of affect, discourse on the cultivation of self-consciousness is necessary to the appearance of shame.

Tracing the appearance of self-consciousness in Hegel, Alexandre Kojève introduces desire's engendering of an awareness of the "I" in his lectures as:

Indeed when man experiences a desire, when he is hungry, for example, and wants to eat, and when he becomes aware of it, he necessarily becomes aware of himself. Desire is always revealed as my desire and to reveal desire, one must use the word "I". Man is *absorbed* by his contemplation of the thing in vain; as soon as desire for that thing is born, he will immediately be "brought back to *himself*." (Kojève 37, emphasis in original)

With this in mind, let us draw the emergence of a similar desire in Nirmal which cultivates self-consciousness. At a dinner organised by the people of Morichjhapi to garner public support, Nirmal is presented a glimpse of the life he would have led had he stayed in Calcutta. Observing them, he becomes aware of his unacknowledged regrets. But on interacting with the people he knew from the city, he turns increasingly critical of them. Speaking of a friend, Nirmal writes:

He laughed in the cynical way of those who, having never believed in the ideals they once professed, imagine that no one else had done so either... but it struck me with great force that I had no business to be self-righteous about these matters. Nilima — she had achieved a great deal. What had I done? What was the work of my life? I tried to find an answer but none would come to mind. (192)

As he begins to reflexively look upon his self, Nirmal is soon presented with a desire that leads him the opposite way. Electing to sit with the people of Morichjahpi instead, he yearns for an identification with them. Nirmal berates his former comrades for their hypocrisy, acknowledges his own lack of worth in the rumblings of his shame, and harbours a desire for the other. The desire to move away from an identification with the city, towards its other in the tide country, leads

⁴Additionally, Dan Zahavi has highlighted the impact the status and authority of the observer makes in the experience of shame in the individual. See Dan Zahavi, *Self & Other*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

him to the consciousness of “I” who struggles and desires.

The first instance of a sought identification follows soon after on his visit to Gorjontola with Horen, Kusum, and her son, Fokir. Nirmal observes the little boy leap over the side of the boat as they approach land and push the boat to the shore. This display of adeptness does not surprise anyone but Nirmal. Kusum’s utterance of pride at the sight as she proudly declares, “the river is in his veins” is received by Nirmal as the negation of his claim as a member of the tide country. As per Sartre’s conception, it is through the other—the true inhabitants of the tide country—that Nirmal’s being gets its “object-state” and his gaze reversed on himself. Nirmal writes, “What would I not have given to be able to say that this was true also of myself that the river flowed in my veins too, laden with all its guilty burdens? But I had never felt so much an outsider as I did at that moment” (245). A parallel is witnessed here with Levinas’ description of the urge to flee oneself. Levinas views pleasure as a concentration in the instant, and the movement of pleasure as a loosening of malaise and a departure from Being (Levinas 62). Pleasure is characterised as an affectivity in his writings because it does not take on the forms of being, but rather attempts to break them up. But pleasure remains a deceptive escape. It is an escape that is bound to fail. Nirmal’s involvement with the refugees can only loosen his malaise, not resolve it. The moment of Nirmal’s escape in the form of his failed identification with the other is always followed by a presence of his self, where the feelings of exhilaration caused by his involvement evaporate and he is left with the nakedness of his being. All attempts at an escape lead to a heightening of self-consciousness and shame.

By Nirmal’s own admission, it is only years after his arrival in the tide country that he wakes from his stupor on accidentally finding himself at Morichjhapi with Horen. Ghosh here reconstructs the Morichjhapi incident (referred as Morichjhapi in the text), which was the scene of violent state action in 1979, leading to the death of several hundreds of refugees including children. Most of the refugees belonged to the Namasudra caste and had settled at Morichjhapi, having migrated to India after the violence of the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. After the creation of Bangladesh, they had been initially relocated to refugee camps in the Dandakarnaya region of Jharkhand. Hailing from the tide country, the refugees never got used to the forests of Dandakaranya and yearned to move back to their home. They were wooed by the State government as a potential electoral base with promises of resettlement to the tide country in Bengal, but the move never materialised. Many of the refugees attempted to move to the

Sunderbans, but most were detained, and only a few reached Marichjhapi. In the face of the coercive state action to evict the refugees, Nirmal finds he can no longer accept the image of himself as a city man without finding himself complicit in the actions of the government. As Nirmal seeks to regain his status as a subject by gaining recognition from the other, the tide country continues to see him as an alien. Neither does he understand Kusum's and Horen's feelings for each other or their choices for survival. His constant formulation of literal movement, the migration as a rebellious "movement" of the people is steeped in a formulation alien to their experience of it.

As Merleau-Ponty suggests, the appearance of shame enacts a dialectic between the self and the other, as that of the master and slave. What it also entails in this reading of neocolonial shame is the reversal of the master-slave dialectic. While Nirmal occupied the privileged position of a city man moving to the Sunderbans and occupying the centre of its social structures earlier, he now seeks identification with and recognition from the other. The reversal of the dialectic is experienced most starkly between Nirmal and Kusum. Nirmal may have harboured the desire to write for a long time, but it is his meeting with Kusum at Morichjhapi that nudges him to write. Kusum becomes the occasion that enables his writing. His thoughts, actions, his very purpose of writing is to speak of Kusum's struggles. "I felt myself torn between my wife and the woman who had become the muse I'd never had," he writes (Ghosh 216). To achieve her wish of settlement at Morichjhapi becomes his labour.

In a departure from Hegel, for Lacan desire emerges as the constant process of questioning what the Other has or desires to have (Seminar XI, 235). For him, desire is the desire of the (M)other. Unlike Hegel's dialectic where both master and slave are initially on an equal footing, for Lacan there is no such equivalence. Desire in the dialectic splits into two aspects—the desire that is projected on to the other and the recognition of the desire of the other. Kusum functions as the (M)other to the extent of introducing Nirmal to alterity in the tide country and being the occasion of his awakening. The absence of the Sundarbans in his perception, its vagaries, the strangely secular rituals at Gorjontola would emerge as the unconscious of the land thus far repressed. Nirmal attributes his waking from the stupor entirely to Kusum—"My pen will have to race to keep up: she is the muse and I am just a scribe" (162). And yet, Nirmal must always rely on Horen to discover Kusum, to understand her, and to experience the Sundarbans through her. It is really Horen who breaks Nirmal into the Symbolic—as the father, "the human being who stands for the law and order that

the mother plants in the life of the child...widens the child's view of the world" (Winnicott 115). The most urgent task for Nirmal in the development of his desire, therefore, as Lacan suggests, is to answer the question—*what does the other want?* Finding a posture for himself with regard to this unfathomable 'x' eludes him. Nirmal is consigned to the situation where there will always be a difference, a gap, between what is desired and what he actually wants. As Lacan articulates it, "[Desire] ...is produced in the margin which exists between the demand for the satisfaction of need and the demand for love" (Lacan Seminar V). To gain meaning from the (M)other eludes Nirmal, being forced to rely on scraps and nods from Horen as an interlocutor.

"To speak of the origin of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to death for recognition" (Kojève 7). In his decision to stay with Kusum on the night preceding the attack on Marichjhapi is his attempt to stake his life, to force a recognition he craves from the M(other). Kusum is thrust into the role of the muse without her knowledge of it, and the possibility of an attraction from Nirmal towards her is repeatedly hinted at in the text. What had thus far been rejected by the ego and its affect denied, re-emerges with a renewed potency for Nirmal as shame after his failure and his survival through the massacre.

Lacan also finds fault with the lack of attention Hegel pays to the unconscious, finding the unconscious to be the force that prompts action. The unconscious is conceived as the existence of the negative—of gaps that impress upon the speech of the "I." It manifests itself in speech "...at that point, where, between and that which it affects, there is something always wrong" (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 22). The unconscious functions as a series of metonymic significations. Unlike Hegel's realisable experience of self-consciousness as mediated reflexivity, Lacan envisions the unconscious as a chain of signifiers constantly interfering with the coherent self-presentation of the conscious subject (Butler 189). The conscious subject is unable to account for this gap with a simple recourse to itself. It is repeatedly confronted with this gap and the discontinuity signified by the unconscious as the absent signifier. Further, the presence of a frustrated desire as a gap wrecks discontinuities in the subject.

Foucault's reformulation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic does away with its dialectical framework while retaining its relation of inversion. Eschewing an attribution of change to a single instance, Foucault, unlike Hegel, argues for a heteronomous order against an orderly development. For Foucault, the heteronomous character of historical change cannot be tamed within a dialectical framework. Instead of

looking for a synthesis, Foucault sets out to show how the two terms of the dialectic can morph into a multiplicity of possibilities. Using Nietzsche's analysis of the master-slave dialectic in *The Genealogy of Morals*, Foucault intends to show how 'forces' do not always result in an ultimate conciliation. For Foucault, the master and slave do not share a common ground and cannot be said to inhabit a system of shared norms. The gap that exists and persists is the generative moment of history itself. It is the scene of conflict on which power is produced and deployed, and values emerge:

Emergence designates a place of confrontation, but not as a closed field offering the spectacle of a struggle among equals...it is a 'non-place,' a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space. Consequently, no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice. (*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 150)

In Hegel, the master and slave share a common space which serves as the basis of their interaction and historical change. While Lacan points us towards an always unequal configuration of power between the two, Foucault also reverses Hegel's assumption of a shared space. Foucault instead asserts that historical experience would emerge at the point where a common ground can no longer be ascertained—Lacan's unbridgeable gap becomes the generative moment of history. Domination becomes the scene where history engenders itself at the moment when values are created and new configurations of force emerge.

The experience of shame and the self's inability to find recognition from the other brings forth Lacan's unbridgeable gap. The possibility of historical change at the inter-subjective level within the dialectic does not seem likely in the absence of a shared space. Nirmal cannot gain the recognition he craves, nor does he have the agency to achieve a potential synthesis of his crisis in the face of a gap, the discontinuity of shame. At this juncture, it is imperative to train a closer eye to substantiate the operation of power and the subjects it constitutes in the text. In Foucault, strategies for law's self-implementation become a moment for a new historical configuration of force. To that extent, in works like *The History of Sexuality*, juridical laws are shown to be generative: they produce the subject and the phenomena they mean to control. Both Nirmal and Ghosh are surprisingly silent on the larger history of the Namasudras in Bengal. While the basis of this omission could be traced to what Sekhar Bandyopadhyay and Anasua Chaudhury attribute to Dalit peasants acquiring the identification of

being ‘refugees’ in post-partition Bengal, This omission can be seen as the very basis of misrecognition. The subject of the ‘refugee’ gains political legibility at the cost of obscuring Namasudra identity and their larger history of oppression.

Partha Chatterjee has formulated the existence of a “political society” in postcolonial democracies which bare marked differences from the civil society and its functions. Drawing on Kalyan Sanyal’s observation that primitive accumulation of capital is accompanied by a parallel process of the reversal of its effects, Chatterjee defines the “political society” in terms of constant political negotiations with the State. The political society is not regarded by the State as a part of the more formally constituted civil society. Rather, these groups are seen as people with statistically described characteristics, and organised as targets for specific governmental policies. Since dealing with this group involves a “tacit acknowledgement of various illegal practices,” they are often treated as exceptions.

The Namasudras in Bengal were wooed as a potential vote bank, constituted as refugees, and their existence in post-independence Bengal can be seen as such a “political society.” As electoral considerations changed, the migrants were labelled illegal, their political negotiating capacity denied, and the tacit acknowledgement of their claim to the Sunderbans withdrawn. They instead began to be seen through the lens of civil society rationale, as subjects of law and violators by ‘occupation’ of Morichjhapi. Environment conservation laws were cited and public opinion generated with the refugees accused of being the most direct threat to wildlife and wildlands. An incident later in the book featuring Piya who is confronted with the spectacle of a trapped tiger being killed by people in a village enacts a confrontation between the increasingly ill-informed policies framed for environment conservation, confining conservation activities only to particular regions without regard for the survival needs of those who inhabit these spaces. The figure of the essentialized natural man living in conjunction with nature circumscribes and produces the subjects that the State aims to govern in these spaces. Piya and Nirmal are both guilty of subscribing to this essentialism in the text.

To then trace the possibility of historical change between the self and its other, the interstice between the two terms of the dialectic deserves greater attention alongside the terms themselves. Butler argues for an understanding of this interstice, this “non-place” of emergence as a “non-dialectical version of difference”:

It appears safe to conclude that for...Foucault, [Hegel’s]

Aufhebung is nothing other than a strategy of concealment, not the incorporation of difference into identity, but the denial of difference for the sake-of positing a fictive identity. (Butler 183)

For Nirmal to effectively recognise the other then would entail an interruption of his subscription to the functioning of the juridical laws that constitute the ideal subject. The other as a product of projected interests would need to be identified as the radically other and not be woven into a narrative that denies difference. The gap encountered by the self cannot be bridged with a recourse to negation.

In so far as we follow shame as an inter-subjective dialectic between the self and other, its need to act upon the conditions that prompt its appearance, to change them or gain recognition from the other, the self is bound to encounter failure. The formulation of the dialectic that functions by granting recognition to the other and claims that the mere act of securing recognition is an answer to social inequities remains unsatisfactory as long as recognition is granted on the terms of the oppressor.⁵ Shame does mark a potential interruption to oppressive practices but is inadequate as the mere interaction between subjects, without a greater radical understanding of the subject's role in service of larger structures of power and laws. To the extent that shame can constitute an ethical challenge, it must do so by being borne as a civilisational albatross across the neck.



⁵See Anita's Chari's critique of the Politics of Recognition in "Exceeding Recognition." *Sartre Studies International*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 110–124.

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Resistance as Embodied Experience: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice"

Anoushka Sinha

Something fearful has happened somewhere. The *nation* doesn't know it.

(Mahasweta Devi, "Behind the Bodice," emphasis added)

Experience and knowledge might seem interchangeable terms. However, when theoretically examined, they pose a conflicting dilemma in their respective nature and relation with each other. On one hand, knowledge is primarily derived from experience. The intrinsic characteristic of intimacy and immediacy of any experience categorizes it as highly subjective. Knowledge, on the other hand, is categorized as objective, pertaining to a certain universal appeal. Hereby arises a schism between the two concepts: experience and knowledge. This paper sets out to interrogate the complex relationship between the two concepts through a critical examination of Mahasweta Devi's short fiction, "Draupadi" (1981) and "Behind the Bodice" (1996). The protagonists of these stories emerge as agents of resistance as the body becomes a crucial site of embodiment of experience. The complexity of experience and its role in the formation of the subject is explored through the course of this paper.

Nation building became a significant enterprise in the formation of the identity of the postcolonial India. This identity was premised upon a certain idea of uniformity which led to the homogenization of the nation's people into a particular perspective. Such perspective, in modern day liberal democracies, is exercised by the state and its various apparatuses (both repressive as well as ideological) to form a singular notion of the nation based on dominant/majoritarian views, thus stripping off its heterogeneity. Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explain this function of the nation-state in *Who Sings the Nation-State?*:

If the state is what "binds," it is also clearly what can and does unbind. And if the state binds in the name of the nation, conjuring a certain version of the nation forcibly, if not powerfully, then it also unbinds, releases, expels, banishes. If it does the latter, it is not always through emancipatory means, i.e. through "letting go" or "setting free"; it expels precisely

through an exercise of power that depends upon barriers and prisons and, so, in the mode of a certain containment. (4–5)

Mahasweta Devi's fiction questions this prerogative of the nation-state by exploring the lives of female subalterns. It is significant to understand the double marginalization that a female subaltern is subjected to as Spivak emphasizes in her seminal essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor... It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (2203)

Dopdi and Gangor, the protagonists of "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice," respectively, are direct victims of the repressive state apparatus. Louis Althusser points out that the repressive state apparatus contains 'the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons.' The word 'repressive' implies that the State Apparatus in question 'functions by violence – at least ultimately' (Althusser 1490). This repressive state apparatus maintains dominant ideology through oppression of the marginalized—the other—whose identity hampers the process of homogenization and 'unification.' The 'other' is significantly subordinate to the 'dominant' in the hierarchy of power and political relation which makes it the 'subaltern.' The Santhal tribe, to which Dopdi Mejhen belongs, becomes the 'subaltern' as it has been rendered 'inferior' through violent historical events of oppression that has its roots in the Aryan invasion and stretches from colonial exploitation to state sanctioned violence.

Knowledge and experience become grounds of contestation in the course of these stories. In "Draupadi," Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhali revolutionary, is on the run from the army troops who have been assigned to forest Jharkhani to repress the rising rebellion among the peasants and tribals against their historical subjugation. The seed of armed revolt can be sourced back to the Santhal Rebellion of 1855. Forming a corrupt nexus, the British and the local zamindars, first arbitrarily auctioned the Santhal land, and then introduced the system of currency to a community which followed the barter system. Inevitably dependent on the local zamindars for money, the Santhals fell into a vicious cycle of never ending debt which bonded generations into this

exploitative system. The Rebellion, therefore, was a reaction against this highly exploitative regime of the colonial rule and the zamindari system forced upon the Santhals. This rebellion, called ‘Hul’ in the local language, predated the 1857 revolt; yet the former is effaced from our history textbooks while the latter is celebrated as the ‘first’ war of independence. This selective historicizing is reflective of how knowledge is manipulated to create the myth of unity on which the idea of nation-state prevails.

There was no improvement in the conditions of the tribal community even Post-Independence. Robbed of their own land, the trap of debt deteriorated their right to life as they were deprived of basic necessities—food, water, and shelter. Years of exploitation led to the Naxalite Movement which aimed at killing the parasitic exploiters—landowners, moneylenders, bureaucrats, policemen, and the state army. Being deprived from drinking water during draught,¹ Dopdi, Dulna (her husband), and fellow Santhals decided to kill Surja Sahu—the exploitative zamindar. The indignation arising from being swindled in an incessant debt-trap is echoed by Dulna while executing Surja Sahu: “I’ll have the first blow, brothers. My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labour to repay that debt” (Devi 27).

Senanayak, the army chief, represents the repressive state apparatus in the story, “Draupadi,” whose function is to ensure ‘class oppression’ and guarantee the ‘conditions of exploitation and its reproduction’ (Althusser 1492). The killing of Surja Sahu (the zamindar) ignites his “hunt” for the ‘main culprits’—Dopdi and Dulna. The army chief safeguards the interests of the State and its partners—the wealthy landlords (in this story)—who form an alliance on the basis of capitalist profit sharing which runs on, perennially sustaining the status quo of subjugation. He is introduced as a shrewd army-chief who ‘in theory’ respects the enemy ‘whatever his practice’ may be. His dictum for combat—“*In order to destroy the enemy, become one (theoretically)*”² demands knowledge about the tribal revolutionaries. This underlines the authorial signification that Senanayak desires—the desire to know

¹In the story the quarrel over water begins when Surja Sahu is confronted with the fact that the ‘untouchables don’t get water’ (Devi 26). This emphasis becomes crucial as the ones who are deprived of drinking water comprise of tribals, Dalits, and poor farmers—the ones whose existence challenges the myth of the nation-state.

²The English words used in the original Bengali text have been italicized in the English translation by Spivak to mark the difference. Spivak elaborates the purpose of retaining such a distinction in the translation: “[It] makes the English page difficult to read. The difficulty is a reminder of the intimacy of the colonial encounter. Mahasweta’s stories are *postcolonial*.”

and therefore, author(ise). He is adamant along with his ‘tribal-specialists’³ to decipher Dopdi’s song that she sung right before killing Surja Sahu. He adopts ‘the hunter’s way, not the soldier’s’ to apprehend Dopdi. Furthermore, being a reader of anti-fascist and rebellion literature (*The Deputy, First Blood*), Senanayak publishes articles in which he demolishes ‘the gentlemen’ (*bhadralok*—for whom he maintains the status quo of repression) and highlights ‘the message of the harvest workers’ (Devi 19–22). In this sense, Senanayak can be seen as the ‘Author’⁴ of tribal subjugation as he annihilates and eliminates revolutionaries—firstly, through ‘the male organ’ of his gun and, secondly, in his theorization, by reducing them to objects of intellectual scrutiny. Dopdi’s text is indecipherable to Senanayak which entices him as an ‘Author’ to give it a meaning. This process of meaning-making to gain knowledge, which he further intellectualizes, begins at the level of “experiential space.”

Gopal Guru defines ‘experiential space’ as ‘a culturalized phenomenon’ in which the ‘...experience that some of the social groups gain from their spatial location’⁵ is reproduced primarily to control people in ‘finite, enclosed, and divided sites’ (78). Guru further asserts that the ‘production of experience’ is inextricably linked to the reproduction of ideologically restructured spaces over time leading to the ‘stability and continuation’ of experience(s) in different forms. Hence, it becomes a means to ‘morally paralyze the victim.’ Within this paradigm, even though ‘the constitutive source of experience’ resides with ‘the tormentor,’ the resultant experience as perceived by the victim does not necessarily conform to the desired result expected by the former. Guru further comments: “For the tormentor, experience acts as a political condition to maintain domination, while the theoretician uses it as a tool of theorization...both these attempts achieve their success based on the objectification of the victim” (82). Therefore, Senanayak as the tormentor and the theoretician strives to author(ise) the experience of the Naxal revolutionaries and, more specifically, of Dopdi. Authorship of experience, then, becomes the ground of contestation in either reproducing the experiential space of the status quo, or subverting it, through authorizing one’s subjective response as against the desired response. Therefore, experience becomes the domain which can be ‘subjectively realized,’ even if it is ‘...objectively produced through the logic of space’ (Guru 72).

³Elite intellectuals—upper-caste Bengalis—the *bhadralok*.

⁴In the Barthesian sense, structurally, the Author-God exercises dominance.

⁵Guru emphasizes, “Space is a culturally constructed phenomenon.” It should not be seen as a neutral geographical marker.

Senanayak's "hunt" for Dopdi and, by extension, other tribal revolutionaries has already instilled in the latter an experiential knowledge—if they are caught, they will be "countered." The linguistic aberration of the term "encounter" to Dopdi's "kounter" is indicative of the shifted signified—it is not the official police encounter that is referred to by the latter, rather the undocumented state-sponsored killings. As Dopdi is apprehended⁶ Senanayak feels both 'triumphant and despondent' at the same time. This despondency arises as Dopdi surrenders, staking herself for her community—thereby outmanoeuvring his attempt to quell the naxal insurgency. She '...ululates with the force of her entire being' right before she is taken into custody, alerting her fellow comrades to escape. This agitates the virility of Senanayak and, therefore, he commands: "Make her. *Do the needful*" (Devi 31).

The parallels between *Mahabharata's* Draupadi and 'Comrade Dopdi' intensify as the last sequence plays out. Analogizing Draupadi, who is disrobed while she menstruates, Dopdi is subjected to custodial rape. However, the contrast is crucial. There is no Krishna, no forefather, no Dulna, no male paternalistic figure in the form of God-Author-Male to 'protect' her. Hereafter, Dopdi enters the gendered experiential space that is meted out on her body. Her body becomes a site of experience as the brutality of sexual violence unfolds: "Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn" (Devi 31). Within the phallogentric signification of power dynamics multiple rapes are meted out on her body to effectuate, through humiliation, the emotion of shame. As Udaya Kumar points out, "Humiliation comprises of acts of enforced shame" (184). Enforced shame paralyzes oneself as the individual is forced into a realm of 'undesired visibility' wherein the subject is unable to inhabit or escape from the experiential space (Kumar 184).

Dopdi's resistance emerges from the experienced subject, who counters the phallogentric nation-state discourse, subverting the system of signification. She walks in her naked black body bathed in blood, to confront Senanayak. Dopdi's 'indomitable laughter' and her nakedness is incomprehensible to Senanayak; he finds himself unable to question—"What is this?" As Dopdi pushes Senanayak 'with her two mangled breasts' and asks: "You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?... What more can you do? Come on, kounter me – come on, kounter me - ?" Senanayak is completely defeated as the phallic power of repressive state apparatus as well as his cognitive

⁶Apprehend means both to arrest and to understand. This point becomes pertinent as Dopdi enters into the experiential space which leads her to experiencing (and in the process understanding) her subjectivity. This also presents another example of the shifted signified as Senanayak fails to "understand" Dopdi at the end of the story.

abilities abandon him. He also fails to engender shame in Dopdi as she rejects the system of male signification that undermines her and inhabits her sexually mutilated body as a weapon of naked protest. At the end of the story Senanayak is rendered mute and his textual manifestations (torment and theory) are silenced as he stands ‘...before an unarmed target, terribly afraid’ (Devi 33).

Mahasweta Devi’s “Behind the Bodice” offers a sharp critique of how the female body is fetishized within cultural spaces. The juxtaposition of popular culture and the so-called high art captures the experiential space that delineates women’s bodies as an “object” of voyeuristic pleasure. On one hand, a song of titillation (*Choli ke Piche Kya Hai?*),⁷ from Subhash Ghai’s film *Khalnayak* (1993), notoriously became the ‘*norm of the day*’ while contemporary issues such as crop failure, *Naramada Bachao Andolan*⁸ were designated as ‘*non-issues*’ by the prevailing ignorance of the nation’s people (Devi 119–120). Theodor Adorno’s take on the sociological implications of what he and Max Horkheimer termed as the “culture industry” analyses how ‘the expression “industry” is not to be taken too literally’ as their primary function is to produce an effect, elicit a response from its consumer—that of seduction, shock, and awe (Wilson 29). In a satiric narration, “what is there [behind the bodice]?” became the ‘*national issue*’; it became a phrase of common parlance (Devi 119).

Upin Puri is an archival photographer whose ‘pictures go at *top* rates abroad’ and who documents drought, famine, polluted rivers, etc., across the remotely underdeveloped regions of India. In one such project in Jharoa, he photographs the Dalit migrant labourer, Gangor, who was breastfeeding her child. This image is published as a newspaper report along with the headline: “The half-naked⁹ ample-breasted female figures of Orissa are about to be raped. *Save them! Save the breast!*” He fetishizes over Gangor’s “mammal projections” as “*statuesque*” and goes on to describe its “aesthetic value” as an “object” of art—‘the cleavage of her Konarak chest,’ ‘like the cave paintings of Ajanta,’ ‘the breasts of the girls at Elora are eroding.’¹⁰ Following the publication of Upin’s article, Gangor’s breasts are subjected to the gaze of millions of people through the newspaper article and an im-

⁷Translation: What is behind the bodice?

⁸This refers to the social movement initiated by activist Medha Patkar against construction of dams in the regions of central India uprooting native tribals and farmers.

⁹Nakedness emerges as an important medium of protest performance in both the stories. On the one hand, it means ‘exposed to harm; vulnerable.’ Conversely, it also means ‘expressed openly.’ (Oxford Dictionary).

¹⁰Konarak, Ajanta, and Elora are erotic sculptural examples which are international and national tourist spots.

PLICIT violence deepens through the collective male gaze. When questioned about his obsession towards Gangor's breasts, Upin declares to his assistant: "Learn to praise and respect a beautiful thing... *There lies all the mystery.*" Gangor's breasts become a quest for Upin. For him they are "*natural, hence unique*" and he wants to "*preserve*" them as he feels they are "*endangered*" (Devi 122–6, emphasis added).

Susan Sontag outlines photography as 'an ethics of seeing' and further details how 'to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed' by claiming '...a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power' (2). Thus, picture-taking becomes an experiential space for Gangor and 'a semblance of knowledge' for Upin and the world that reviews his photograph (Sontag 18). Gangor's social reality as a Dalit migrant laborer, working on a piece wage basis, is not the subject of Upin's photography. He rather produces a voyeuristic picture of titillation whose focal point is to sexualize Gangor's breasts within a system of phallogocentric signification. The penetrative lens of Upin's camera leads to the horrendous performance of sexual violence by the repressive state apparatus—Gangor is gang-raped by the local police of Seopura—because she 'jiggled her body all the time' being a '[s]hameless country girl' (Devi 132). Gangor is doubly raped: first by Upin's archival photography and then by police. As the text narrates, "There is no *non-issue* behind the bodice, there is a rape of the people behind it, Upin would have known if he had wanted to, could have known" (Devi 138). This narratorial comment suggests Upin's complicity in his deliberate ignorance of the consequence of his archivization of dispossessed people—rape of the people—wherein knowledge sought through ethnographic documentation takes an unethical turn. As Sontag points out, photography becomes an act equivalent to 'sexual voyeurism' if it maintains the status quo. Likewise, Upin's attempt to "understand" the "mystery" behind Gangor's breasts leads to an interpretative exercise of imposing a phallogocentric meaning to the Dalit migrant's decontextualized body (in the photograph) by sexualizing it.

Gangor's body first becomes a 'sight' of knowledge for the world through Upin's photography sans its ethnographic and cultural context (Dalit migrant laborer in Jharoa). Subsequent sexual violence meted out on her body results in her body becoming a site of experience. Gangor emerges as a resistant subject who claims authorship over her experience—she accuses the police for their crime and registers a case against them. In her final confrontation with Upin she performs a defiant naked protest wherein she takes off her blouse to shock Upin's penetrative gaze with "two dry scars" which are not the breasts that he fetishized (Devi 137). At this moment of final confrontation

Upin's ethnographic endeavor—his way of seeing it as a meaning-making enterprise—is challenged through Gangor's experiential knowledge. The order of expected responses is reversed as it effectuates shame in Upin instead of satisfaction, he undergoes a moral paralysis wherein he is neither able to inhabit the newly attained consciousness of his ethnographic violence nor able to escape it.

It is crucial to note that both Dopdi and Gangor are introduced as experienced and resistant subjects at the onset of their respective stories; they subvert the homogenizing myth of the nation-state through the assertion of their identity as subalterns. However, it is only when they enter the experiential space of sexual violence meted out to invoke shame in them that they emerge as defiant gendered subalterns. As the body becomes the primary site of experience, naked performance, by both Dopdi and Gangor, emerges as resistance which in turn results from the embodiment of experience in these stories. Kathleen Canning discusses the significance of embodiment of experiences and social identities with respect to Elisabeth Grosz's notion of 'counterstrategic reinscription.' According to it, the body apart from being 'the site of knowledge-power' is also 'a site of resistance' as it '...exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counterstrategic reinscription, for it is capable of being...self-represented in alternative ways' (Canning 505–6). Canning further comments, "Subjects thus produced are not simply the imposed results of alien, coercive forces; the body is internally lived, experienced, and acted upon by the subject and the social collectivity" (506). In light of this statement, nakedness becomes a means of agentive resistance rather than shameful vulnerability. Dopdi and Gangor's resistance defines them as gendered subaltern subjects. Such a redefinition signifies Dopdi and Gangor's attempts to recast their identity as politically legitimate subjects of justice—in this case as gendered subalterns.



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Exploring the Anxiety of Action in *Call Me by Your Name*

Suchandra Bose

André Aciman's novel *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) is divided into four parts each of which intends to capture Elio's conflicted emotions in the purview of his doomed love for Oliver, a 24 year old scholar from America. Elio's incessant need to impede his actions through the ambivalence of speech, wavering desires, and misconstrued ideas lays foundation for the subjectivity of action and, more acutely, his anxiety. Consequently, it becomes integral to examine the location of Elio's anxiety either in a same-sex relationship or the universality of anxiety in the context of the novel. The essay hopes to map the similarities of the queer experience permeating across definite time periods, cultural landscape, and religious identity keeping in mind Elio's own subjective experience. It also intends to explore the inception of anxiety in view of the text at hand, the subjectivity of action in terms of the less than hopeful resolution, and how the possibility of circumventing these anxieties is in tandem with the changing locations in the novel.

The novel, in its very premise introduces us to the idea of subjectivity in 'meaning.' For instance, the word "Later" entails different meanings at different stages in the novel (Aciman 1). Elio is stunned by Oliver's "harsh, curt, and dismissive..." way of leave-taking by using the said word in the beginning (Aciman 1). The meaning of the word then transmutes into a metaphor for delay in action: "Just be quiet, say nothing, if you can't say "yes" don't say "no," say "later"" (Aciman 52). In another instance, "later" suggests the inability to say goodbye, the avoidance of using a word that anticipates parting. The word also suggests the possibility of a relationship between the two characters—Rabbi Hillel's injunction "If not now, when?" is replaced with the idea "If not later, when?" (Aciman 51). Elio moulds the meaning of the word "later" in accordance with the shifting spatial-temporal setting. Subjectivity emerges from the spaces created through alternating 'meanings.' In short, the ambiguity of evolving meanings creates a space for queer desire; their language creates a space for communication that the otherwise dominant cultural milieu will relegate to the margins. The subjectivity in 'meaning' acts as an antecedent to the creation of space for the same sex lover.

In the context of the novel, therefore, the intrinsic question arises from the need for separate spaces for the lovers—the need for secrecy. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick articulates same-sex love as “famous for daring not speak its name” (Sedgwick 41). Which implies that much of the novel is about what is left unsaid than what is said; for example, in “Monet’s Berm” Oliver says “Don’t ever say you didn’t know” and Elio admits “His words made no sense. But I knew exactly what they meant” (Aciman 150). Thereby, secrecy and ambiguity play a critical role in propelling the plot into motion. Queer desire, as Sedgwick states, is never openly discussed, neither is it “name(d)” (41). In opposition, “coming out” becomes an integral part of the “heterosexual” culture wherein the “double binds” of public and private dictate the agency of the same-sex lovers (Sedgwick 44). The experience of love cannot be spoken out loud, and neither can it bypass the binaries. Therefore, for Sedgwick the idea of “coming out” entails that:

Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn’t know whether they know or not (about their sexual orientation)... The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life... (42)

In which case, the “closet” is intrinsic to the same sex lover—the image of an enclosed space. This idea of being trapped, which further ripples into—after “coming out”—the multiple traps of “coming out” leading to negotiating these spaces vis-à-vis one’s social landscape. Elio and Oliver avoid the “closet” but the centrality of the closet is in the enclosed spaces of “secrecy” (Sedgwick 41) which further emphasizes upon the duality of the closet—the idea of “coming out” and its trappings with the confines of not “coming out.”

Therefore, the location of the novel gains primacy—the space created in the unnamed village of Italy makes the love affair possible. The village establishes a location that is isolated from brazen homophobic prejudices. However, despite the ideal setting of Italy, Oliver and Elio are intimate with one another in closed quarters only. For instance, Elio is open to have intercourse with Marzia at the beach but he gets intimate with Oliver only in secluded corners like the Monet’s Berm (Aciman 81); the only exception being the time they spent together in Rome—they kissed in open spaces disregarding the pedestrians (Aciman 205). Rome, therefore, emerges as an escape from the figures of authority who invoke fear. Fear, thereby, acts a fulcrum to negotiate his identity in context of his relationships. Even though Elio’s father would never repudiate his feelings for Oliver but rather encourage them, Oliver, at one point, states that his father would have

sent him to a correctional facility if he had been found out like Elio (Aciman 227). This insists upon Oliver's identity as an American belonging to a somewhat orthodox family, who will eventually settle into a heterosexual relationship as opposed to Elio's trajectory. However, they are both skirting around the ambivalence of language to communicate, creating separate spaces away from probing crowd, which in turn highlights the universality of anxiety in the homosexual lover despite their orthodox or liberal upbringing.

James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* also negotiates through similar spaces of queer desire in a predominantly heterosexist setting. The novel brings to fore the complexities of the same-sex desire in tandem with the questions of race through the lens of the othered homosexual. However, much like *Call me by Your Name*, the spatial setting of Giovanni's 'room' establishes the binaries of the public and private. David, the protagonist of the novel, is hesitant to accept Giovanni beyond the threshold of the 'room.' The space created within the parameters of the room encourages the lovers to behave in accordance with their desire; for example, David's desire to play the 'housewife' (88). However, David must navigate through these desires in order to circumvent the anxieties of the queer lover, which he is unable to. The room is a symbolic representation of the private space created by the closeted lover. Negotiating these binaries or the creation of spaces allows same-sex love to exist without the interference of societal restrictions. The spaces they create are an extension to the anxieties of the same-sex lovers who are afraid to 'come out' into the open.

Eve Sedgwick argues that "a lot of the energy of attention and demarcation (that) has swirled around issues of homosexuality since the end of the nineteenth century, in Europe and the United States..." (44). Moreover, the "dangerous incoherence" of the heterosexist culture through the mapping of these "issues" underlines the "crossing and recrossing" of the "closet" to be inexorable (Sedgwick 44). In which case, the created spaces of David's room and Elio's Italy become an extension of the "closet" made central through the fear of the dominant heterosexist cultural location, which in turn elucidates upon the performance of heteronormativity; for example, the presence of David and Elio's female partners. The binds of the spatial setting are ineffably being 'crossed and recrossed' not only through the performance of heterosexuality but also through the secrecy of the spaces created. The "double binds" (Sedgwick 44) of experience in their same-sex desire renders the closet both inconsequential and immutable within a heterosexist space, thus requiring the constant need to create a 'closet' for more 'closets' to be created later.

Yukio Mishima in *Confessions of a Mask* also delves into the anxieties of the “self” which further necessitate the desire to create private spaces opposing the heterosexual public performance in context of his homosexual identity. Even though set in the distinct socio-political context of Imperial Japan, the universality of performance of the queer self may arguably pervade through the clear-cut divisions of culture, time, and space; for example, the narrator states that he feels a “sense of uneasiness” about his identity as he needs to “understand” himself as opposed to the other boys who have had no such prerequisite. His “uncertainty” emerges from his same-sex desires and his inclination towards sexual violence. In Imperial Japan, his identity is defined by his ability to “play a part” (Mishima 65). He cannot be his “natural” self as he would unequivocally be othered in the context of his social location (65). Much like Elio’s desire for Oliver which is never discussed in the open, he never confides his feelings in his friends or family. His father touches upon the subject of his love towards Oliver, but it is in the end of the novel, not during their tryst, whereas Elio does not have any qualms about discussing Marzia with his father (Aciman 51). Through this conscious choice of confidence, Elio, to a certain extent, also seems to be “play(ing) a part.” Dan Zahavi in his essay “Subjectivity and the First Person Perspective” states:

When I experience myself and when I experience others, there is, in fact, a common denominator. In both cases, I am dealing with embodiment and one of the features of my embodied subjectivity is that it, per definition, entails acting and living in the world. When I go for a walk, write a letter, or play ball, to use Strawson’s classic examples (Strawson 1959, 111), I am experiencing myself, but in a way that anticipates the manner in which I would experience others and others would experience me. (4)

In the context of Mishima’s novel Zahavi anticipates his “I” in purview of the societal rejection of his identity as the homosexual other. In Elio’s case, his lack of communication about his feelings for Oliver with his family members highlights his own anxiety of becoming the Other, in spite of the fact that his family would accept his identity. Thereby, he is experiencing the “I” in tandem with the ‘other’ of society, he is experiencing himself in anticipation of how others would experience him. He is experiencing the fear of being othered.

In short, the trope of the queer homosexual narrative can be summarised by the initial ambivalence to the same sex desire, the performance of being heterosexual, which compels the “I” to “come out” or not, which nonetheless renders the “self” to be closeted, into the bi-

naries of spaces or specific identities patent in a novel like *Confessions of a Mask*. However, the idea of one's sexual identity is contested in *Call me by Your Name* not only through his polyamorous relationship with Marzia and Oliver but also through the episode in which they call each other by their names. The exchange of identity is primary in circumventing their anxiety in action, however momentary the event may be. While tracing the narrative of the novel the exchange of identities certifies their ability to move beyond the restrictions of conventional identities. However, the last interior monologue establishes the inability to communicate again beyond the binaries of the self and the other:

I stopped for a second. If you remember everything, I wanted to say, and if you are really like me, then before you leave tomorrow, or when you're just ready to shut the door of the taxi and have already said goodbye to everyone else and there's not a thing left to say in this life, then, just this once, turn to me, even in jest, or as an afterthought, which would have meant everything to me when we were together, and, as you did back then, look me in the face, hold my gaze, and call me by your name. (Aciman 248)

This inability is portrayed twice in the narrative: the first time when Elio calls Oliver as Elio, nine years later, only to realise that he has forgotten and the second time is in the conclusion of the novel (Aciman 231).

In context of their exchanged names their Jewish identity is also brought to the fore. Elio narrates that their shared Jewish identity "transcended all difference" (Aciman 19). His sense of unity in his shared identity roused in him a feeling of home—"Was he my home, then, my home coming? You are my homecoming" (Aciman 49). The intermittent references to their Jewish identity, more often than not, reside in the pretext of brotherhood—an identity that was safely "tucked away" but is now brought to the fore (Aciman 19). Janet R. Jacobsen in her essay 'Queers Are Like Jews, Aren't They? Analogy and Alliance Politics' explores the idea of "difference" in the scope of queer and Jewish identity. She contests the idea of "analogy" (66) in regard to these identities stating that these identities could "is like" and simultaneously "is not like" each other (86). Thereby implying that the Jewish and queer identity are 'analogous' to one another in the pretext of their marginalised identities despite being two very 'different' identities.

The idea of "differences" itself eschews the unstable unity of the two identities—Jewish and queer—vis-a-vis Jacobsen's argument,

what binds and separates them is the “differences” of these identities sidelined by the dominant culture. In other words, the point of convergence lies in the shared identity of the marginalised other—the shared “differences”—not only as Jews but also as same-sex lovers which in turn “transcends all differences” (Aciman 19). In other words, both the exchange of names and their Jewish identity marks a point of unity. It helps mitigate the anxiety that is inherent in Elio’s experience of queer desire. The creation of spaces through this unity leads to the synthesis of the “differences” by both confronting and navigating them. The created spaces exist in lieu of the dearth of spaces to engage in the same-sex love—the ‘closet’ is both safe and claustrophobic. Therefore, when the identities converge through religious identity and the act of exchanging names the ‘differences’ collapse despite their marginalised positions that more often than not are compromised in the dominant culture.

However, what remains seminal is the “differences” that exist despite their moment of shared identities palpable in their inability to sustain their relationship. Elio’s desire—“please don’t hurt me”—will upend its meaning and suggest “hurt me all you want” (Aciman 25). The anxiety is woven into the ambiguity of communication—Elio hesitates between his desires to “I had to let him know I was totally indifferent to him” (Aciman 52) and “Just say something, just touch me” (Aciman 59). These two desires however disparate are experienced by the same individual. Is it the fear of the same-sex desire or the anxiety of a lover irrespective of his sexual orientation? Even though difficult to ascertain, Jacobsen’s examination of the idea of “differences” subsists. The differences that bind them together also disable them from uniting in lived time which affirms that the “differences” in experience of the heterosexual lover and the same-sex lover in a heterosexist location cannot be one and the same. In short, the shared identities establish contact but also destabilise their relationship as it can never be normative—the creation of ‘meaning’ and space both liberates and restricts them.

Annamarie Jagose states that contemporary theory challenges “...the very notion of the natural, the obvious, and the taken-for-granted” (102). The identity of the queer lover contests the idea of “natural” and redefines it. Moreover, the escape from the definite binds of identities is made explicit throughout the trajectory of the novel which ignites a dialogue about the inescapability of identities—the act of exchanging names is possible only once. Elio’s desire is marked by the subjectivities of the self-conscious lover which become more potent when aligned with his same sex desires. The narrative of

the novel contradicts such an analysis when Elio's ability to consummate his love for Oliver is brought in focus. However, the analysis persists when his love is shortly undercut by their moving beyond the spatial, temporal setting of mid-1980's Italy. The resolution to this is Oliver's monogamous heterosexual marriage and Elio's persistent love for him, made emphatic through his interior monologues suggesting the abandonment of these "ghost spots" not in memory but in real time (Aciman 210). They cannot exist together in a different location, when their love was situated in a created reality of space and time, hidden away from prying eyes.

The subjectivity of meaning, the ambivalence of action, and the creation of spaces for the othered identity ascertain the anxiety of action in the novel. The anxiety teeters in fear of trespassing beyond the given "natural" identity in the dominant culture, which in turn contests the specificity of identification and its stereotypes. Elio and Oliver's romance is determined by the security of spaces they create—the "spots" (Aciman 210)—which are not tainted by the "taken for-granted" (Jagose 102). However, the fairytale romance must end when the creation of these spaces debilitate in the face of lived reality after the summer holiday. Their romance in Italy manages to create a space of security but it also becomes a microcosm for a world where prejudices are not explicit but covert. Consequently, the creation of spaces 'instigates' anxiety in a predominantly heterosexist world, leading to the subjective actions of an anxious lover.



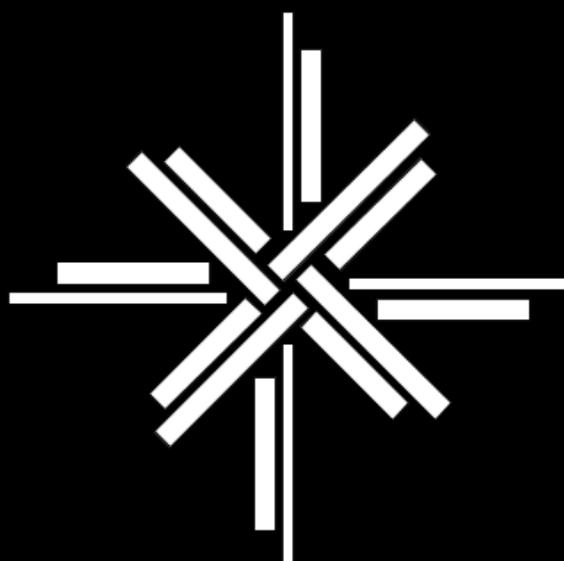
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