

AN AESTHETIC
EDUCATION IN
THE ERA OF
GLOBALIZATION

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river's right bank stretched a verdant island some 13 miles long. The Native American Lenape people called it Manna-hatta, roughly translated as "island of many hills." Approximately two-thirds of the way up the island, in line with present-day 158th Street, Hudson and his crew passed a fishing camp, though in April, the Lenape people had probably not made their yearly migration to that spot yet. . . . Archeological evidence exposed during the construction boom of the early 1900s revealed that the Native American Lenape had once maintained a seasonal fishing camp at the foot of present-day 158th Street.³⁵

The Lenape made maps in the head. Figure 26 shows a paper map of their land. I live there now.

I live right next to what was once "New Harlem": "Within a quarter century of Hudson's 1609 voyage, Dutch colonists had settled in lower Manhattan and by 1637, a group had established a village in the flat expanse just south of the hills the Lenape people called *Penadnic*. The Dutch called their village New Harlem and the rocky heights to the north, Jochem Pieter's Hills."

It is the negotiability of senders and receivers that allows teleiopoiesis, touching the distant other with imaginative effort. The question of negotiability, like all necessary impossibilities, must be forever begged, assumed as possible before proof. Space is caught in it, as is the calculus of the political, the economic, and everything that writes our time. I ask you to negotiate between the rock of social history and the hard place of a seamless culture, to honor what we cannot ever grasp. Is there anyone out there any more for such negotiations, except in name?

Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular

HERE I AM in the belly of the beast, arguing subalternity with a second academic generation of U.S. subalternists in the presence of the first generation of brothers always claimed as authorities—with the father, Ranajit Guha (affectionately nicknamed "Pope" by the brothers) absent in Australia.¹

(It may be added that the first claim to subaltern studies, after metropolitan publication, came from Latin America via the University of Pittsburgh.² Currently the claim has developed in France, Germany, Belgium, and Spain, on the part of the first generation of immigrant European students and academics, especially women. This is comparable to the rise of Cultural Studies in the United States. In Italy, scholars hold on to Indian Subaltern Studies, with a bit of Marx, a bit of Gramsci.³ The U.S. subalternists are led by South Asianists.

The "subaltern" as a concept has dissipated itself in the work of the brothers in interesting ways. Foucault's unilinear criticism of "governmentality" [with bio-politics now added, as in Hardt and Negri] has inspired some of their most interesting writings.⁴ It is therefore appropriate, for example, that Michele Spano should be energized by Dipesh Chakrabarty's definition of the subaltern: "the figure of the difference that governmentality all over the world has to subjugate and civilize."⁵ The earlier Antonio Negri inherited this unilinear opposition to the state from Louis Althusser.)

I have insisted throughout this book that Gramsci's attitude toward the state sees it as both medicine and poison and leads to a permanent educative activism. This has been corroborated, for me, by the conviction

that, in a global situation where the undoing of the possibility of a welfare state or dismantling already existing welfare states is required for the march of capitalism, "governmentality" has been made minor; and, when rampant, it was indifferent to the subaltern (as opposed to the working class or the deserving poor), incidentally obliged to keep difference in place. In such a situation, in response to metropolitan romanticization of something called the "subaltern," it is problematic to reproduce the voice of French or "French" ex-bourgeois critics of the twentieth century, impatient with the fruits of Second International Communism while distracted by a seemingly intractable Communist Party.⁶ When I do so, I learn that governmentality subsumes the subaltern imperfectly, so that the subject remains unable to sabotage the Enlightenment. Why do we teach if we feel teaching is unnecessary? What I wrote must be read with these additions in mind.

Subaltern is to popular as gender is to sex, class to poverty, state to nation. One word inclines to reasonableness, the other to cathexis—occupation through desire. "Popular" divides between descriptive (as in presidential or TV ratings) and evaluative (not "high," both a positive and a negative value, dependent on your "politics") and contains "people," a word with immense range, from "just anyone" to the "masses" (both a positive and a negative political value, depending on your politics). The reasonable and rarefied definition of the word "subaltern" that interests me is: to be removed from all lines of social mobility.

The disciplinary interest of literary criticism is in the singular and the unverifiable. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" it was the peculiar and singular subalternity of the young Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri that seemed of interest. Her story was my mother Sivani Chakravorty's testimony. The question of veridicality—of the evidentiary status of testimony, sometimes taken for granted in unexamined oral history—has to be thought of here.

Gilles Deleuze's notion of singularity is both complex and simple. In its simplest form, the singular is not the particular because it is an unrepeatable difference that is, on the other hand, repeated—not as an example of a universal but as an instance of a collection of repetitions. (Derrida will come to call this the "universalizable.") Singularity is life as pure immanence. As the name Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri became a teaching text, it took on this imperative—repeat as singular—as does literature.⁷

If the thinking of subalternity is taken in the general sense, its lack of access to mobility may be a version of singularity. Subalternity cannot be generalized according to hegemonic logic. That is what makes it subaltern. Yet it is a category and therefore repeatable. Since the general

sense is always mired in narrow senses, any differentiation between subalternity and the popular must thus concern itself with singular cases and thus contravene the philosophical purity of Deleuze's thought.⁸

The starting point of a singular itinerary of the word "subaltern" can be Antonio Gramsci's "Southern Question"—a discussion specifically of underdeveloped Southern Italy—rather than his more general discussions of the subaltern. I believe that was the basic starting point of the South Asian Subaltern Studies collective—Gramsci, a communist, thinking beyond capital logic in terms of unequal development. Subsequently, Partha Chatterjee developed a nuanced reading of both Gramsci and Foucault.⁹

It is from "Some Aspects of the Southern Question," then, that we can move into Ranajit Guha's "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India."¹⁰ "Subaltern" in the early Guha was the name of a space of difference. And the word was indistinguishable from "people."

Although Guha seems to be saying that the words "people" and "subaltern" are interchangeable, I think this is not a substantive point for him. At least in their early work, the members of the Subaltern Studies collective would not quarrel with the notion that the word "subaltern" and the idea of the "popular" do not inhabit a continuous space.

Subalternity is a position without identity. It is somewhat like the strict understanding of class. Class is not a cultural origin, although there is working class culture. It is a sense of economic collectivity, of social relations of formation as the basis of action. Gender is not lived sexual difference. It is a sense of the collective social negotiation of sexual differences as the basis of action. Race assumes racism. Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action. The early subalternists looked at examples where subalternity was brought to crisis, and a basis for militancy was formed. Even then colonial and nationalist historiography did not recognize it as such. Could the subaltern speak, then? Could it have its insurgency recognized by the official historians? Even when, strictly speaking, they had burst the outlines of subalternity? This last is important. Neither the groups celebrated by the early subalternists nor Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, insofar as they had burst their bonds into resistance, were in the position of subalternity. No one can say "I am a subaltern" in whatever language. And subaltern studies will not reduce itself to the historical recounting of the details of the practice of disenfranchised groups and remain a study of the subaltern, in the sense in which the term is now useful.

Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action. Both Gramsci and Guha imply this, of course. But I came to it through Marx.

I came to it through the very well-known and misunderstood passage in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, which I have repeatedly invoked in this book, where Marx is talking about class formation in two ways, about how the same group of people are and are not a class, depending upon whether they have a consciousness of class. Marx comes to the conclusion that small peasant proprietors in France are a class, to use contemporary language, as a constative, but not as a performative. It is in that connection that he writes: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." That passage, about the difference between the two ways of being a class, was what gave me a sense of what I later learned to call the difference between subalternity and agency. Agency was the name I gave to institutionally validated action, assuming collectivity, distinguished from the formation of the subject, which exceeds the outlines of individual intention. The idea of subalternity became imbricated with the idea of non-recognition of agency. Did Marx intend this? I believe so. When I came across Bhubaneshwari's story, the resource that was to hand produced the account that this woman's resistance in extremis was not recognized. It was unfortunate that I used the metaphor of not-speaking for this. It caused a lot of confusion. Indeed, many readers think that metaphor applies to the widows hurned on husbands' pyres. This leads to further confusion.

The line from the Marx passage to Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri can be discerned if we look at Marx's German. The best English translation goes: "They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name." In the German it is *Sie sind daher unfähig, ihr Klasseninteresse im eigenen Namen . . . geltend zu machen*.¹¹ Because of the absence of infrastructural institutions, which are the condition and effect of class-consciousness, "they could not make their class-interest count," to have what they are saying and doing be recognized as such.

The early subalternists accepted this as the challenge of their new historiography. Their sources were the texts of an elite that was constituted by this non-recognition. They could not therefore deduce subalternity from the textual or archival evidence. They solved the problem by putting forward a "negative consciousness."¹² And I, instead of noticing that they were finessing the problem, said they were using essentialism strategically. But essentialism is always used strategically, to bypass or acknowledge difference. Today, realizing that subalternity is a position without identity—that like the value-form it is contentless—I cannot think that the project is to fill it with a "negative" essence. Subaltern content takes on identity, names itself "people." "People" becomes a slogan too quickly. To appreciate Gramsci's vision, we must know that, outside of

such politics, subalternization does not stop. I have not been able to get my hands on Peter Hallward's book. But I understand he thinks this is just too non-specific and therefore not political.¹³ Some people think an interest in the subaltern takes us away from secularism. I have tried to answer that charge in "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," Chapter 18 in this book.

To want to hegemonize the subaltern, of which the subalternist revision of historiography is an important but relatively autonomous part, transforms the academic intellectual into a "permanent persuader."¹⁴ The subalternists, having chosen to persuade a change in the historiography of the nineteenth, and the first half of the twentieth centuries in India, exhausted that vein when the project became a part of curricula. They seem now engaged in excellent postcolonial exercises away from the subaltern classes. Alternatively, there is some recounting of the details of the practice of disenfranchised groups. This is useful work, but only constative, there is no effort here to touch the subaltern or, with the energy with which historiographic practice is questioned, to question the political strategy that appropriates the disenfranchised in the interest not of governmentality, but democracy as body count, hardly bio-politics either. This is, of course, perfectly compatible with established ideas of the role of the academic intellectual. Contemporary political conduct, as it is now studied by the subalternists, does not rise to the status of the texts of the elite in earlier work. It is not decoded and contrasted to that which it subverts: the conformity of the subaltern to its own social norms. I am suggesting, of course, that this, the decoding and subverting of the elite text, was the "performative" part of early subalternist work, in the interest of changing historiography. Today, there is no residue of that earlier clandestine attempt to graft this performative and the constative of correct historical description.¹⁵

The oral version of what became "Can the Subaltern Speak?," titled "Power and Desire," was presented before I had read the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*. Perusal of that book and the subsequent meeting with the collective represented such a change in intellectual direction that it led to the placement of the initial theoretical coding upon a collective (rather than singular) phenomenon: Sati-reform: white men are saving brown women from brown men. That incendiary sentence, come back to haunt our time, does not apply to the abstract virtue of the reform itself, of course. In the essay the reform is called "in itself admirable!"¹⁶ In order for the presuppositions of the reform to reach the affective field of the popular, however, a kind of involvement with subaltern female subjectivity had to be undertaken that was inconsonant with colonialism. Although the essay did not fully theorize the connection between this absence of affective/epistemic change with the non-recognition of Bhubaneshwari's "resistance," that is its burden. Thus the focus of subalternity in the essay remained the

singular woman who attempted to send the reader a message, as if her body were a "literary" text. The message of the woman who hanged herself was one of unrecognizable resistance, an unrecognizable refusal of victimage by reproductive heteronormativity. As already mentioned, I had learned the importance of making unrecognizable resistance recognizable from "The Eighteenth Brumaire," a rather different recognition from the one touted by today's liberal multiculturalism.¹⁷

The only criticism of the subaltern studies group in "Deconstructing Historiography" was that they were gender-blind. In the next volume, Ranajit Guha produced "Chandra's Death," where the dead woman also remained singular.¹⁸ There too the theme is reproduction. But the woman is a victim, without even the minimal activity of suicide.

What I am now suggesting is that constative subaltern studies, radical in its place and time, was questioning colonial and nationalist as well as Marxist historiography. Its connection to the performative was to attempt to expand the horizons of historiography. I am suggesting that their focus on the bringing into crisis of subalternity by the subaltern, and its non-recognition because they could not make it *count* for such historians as Eric Hobsbawm, who called such activity "pre-political," inevitably called for another kind of "setting-to-work," to which most of them did not rise. I am suggesting that Gramsci also called for such a setting-to-work in his conception of the organic intellectual. The call is for another performativity, a contamination of the outlines of historiography by its own place in history, so that the subaltern is not merely protected by "negative consciousness," as the new historiography continues endlessly to read the archives against the grain. Such work is useful, but only, at best, for correcting the constative.

In *Primitive Rebels*, Eric Hobsbawm enters into the intimacy of the ethnographer with the communities he describes as "pre-political."¹⁹ He believes in accessing the mind-set of the other, "getting a 'feel' for them" (p. v), yet he finds comfort in knowing that some of his subjects will never read his books (p. vi). This is disciplinary protection of another kind. In my interdisciplinary intervention, I began to see (this is, of course, an abreactive stereotyping of myself) that, however ethnographic his practice, Hobsbawm did at least call them pre-political, not pre- or para-historical, nor merely anthropological, so perhaps he was not quite as culpable as the nationalist historiography that could not make these people count as history. Yet Hobsbawm too was stopping the problem of the unrepresentability of the subaltern (position) with no more than ethnographic regret.

Gramsci, the thinker of subalternity as an amendment of mere capital logic, had, in his figuration of the organic intellectual, given us an idea of

expanding the horizon of historiography as an activity. In an extended consideration, I would question the concept-metaphor of the "organic," but that would not lead to a disagreement with Gramsci's general point.

This entire hook is driven by the notion of subalternity, which in turn drove a classically aesthetically educated, class-displaced Southern European named Antonio Gramsci. I will therefore not linger on a specific analysis here. Suffice it to say that, when I first delivered this lecture, the subaltern I proposed was somewhat more impervious than Gramsci's. There are at least two reasons for this. First, Gramsci's thought-world had seemed to be more mono-gendered than it was. And, subalternity as position without identity computed differently in a world where the role of the Communist Party as envisaged by Gramsci in his jail cell was significantly different from anything that either we or the early subalternists could imagine.²⁰ This too has changed with the sweeping mandates of the international civil society. And one particular insight of Gramsci's has remained pertinent throughout: "The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government."²¹ I add here Raymond Williams's dynamic sense of the "dominant" as defined by its ceaseless appropriation of the emergent, as it is forced into mere alternative from the actively oppositional, the lines shifting, another one of my touchstones. Hobsbawm's and the early subalternists' limiting of the subaltern within the historiographical may be seen as such an appropriation. By contrast, it was the intention of saving the singular oppositional that the example of Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri taught me so long ago. That message in her body led outside disciplinary limits.

Gramsci's description of the organic intellectual fits the vast network of U.S. tertiary education well: "the 'organic' intellectuals which every new class creates alongside itself and elaborates"—Gramsci uses this word in the strong sense of "working through"—"in the course of its development, are for the most part 'specialisations' of partial aspects of the . . . activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence."²²

I think it can be argued that there is such a connection between the gradual emergence of a global secessionist managerial class, and a self-styled international civil society of self-selected moral entrepreneurs with no social contract—with the transference of power from Britain to the United States in the middle of the last century—and the transmogrification of the subaltern into the humanist figure of the "people," a noun that cannot enter into singularity. Our conjuncture needs "people," a pluralized general category that has no necessary class-description.²³ In a broad

understanding, the subaltern historian as the historian of the popular is the organic intellectual of the class-shuffle between the old and new imperial worlds. Gramsci had expanded class-logic to think of bringing the subaltern into hegemony. This new development recodes both class-logic and the Gramscian task for corporate fundraising to purchase virtue for capitalist globalization.

Insofar as one can examine one's own production, I situate my concern with subalternity within this narrative. One must think that this can help produce an effort not to be helplessly confined within one's class-culture of origin, an effort not to be fully determined by history. One recalls with embarrassment Gramsci's further description: "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' . . ." This may seem too radical if your goal is the constative, but there is no gainsaying that Gramsci is looking to "generat[e] by a joint and simultaneous grafting . . . of the performative and the constative."²⁴ I defend this effort by quoting Gramsci further, and questioning both "the position assumed by the social complex of intellectuals [whose philosophy] can be defined as the expression of that social utopia by which the intellectuals think of themselves as 'independent,' autonomous, endowed with a character of their own, etc.," and, on the other hand, those old-style new historiographers who have forgotten that "school is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated."²⁵

What we are speaking of, then, is the bringing of the subaltern from the deduced *subject* of crisis to the logic of *agency*. Can this be equated with the activation of singularity into multiplicity? I think not.

Singularity was a questioning of the universal-particular dyad. The singular is repeated, with a difference. That is how the "human" is repeated-in-difference in single humans, prior to the construction of personhood or individuality. It is a powerful concept, anchored in good sense, questioning both universalism and identitarianism. Such differently repeated singularities collectively are a multiplicity. This is not an empirical collective, not, in other words, a multitude. As long as we remember these are ways of thinking, always inclined to the empirical, we can continue to work. If we reduce them to the empirical alone, turn subaltern into popular, we are merely disputatious chroniclers.

If the repetition of singularity that gives multiplicity is the repetition of difference, agency calls for the putting aside of difference. Agency presumes collectivity, which is where a group acts by synecdoche: the part that seems to agree is taken to stand for the whole. I put aside the surplus of my subjectivity and synecdochize myself, count myself as the part by

which I am metonymically connected to the particular predicament, so that I can claim collectively, engage in action validated by that very collective. A performative contradiction connects the metonymy and the synecdoche into agential identity.²⁶ All calls to collectivity are metonymic because attached to a situation. And they work by synecdoche. Now in order to be able to restrict singularity by agential intuition, an immense labor of infrastructural change, to make resistance count (*geltend*), to make it recognizable, must be undertaken. This is where aesthetic education kicks in, sees the way reasonable agency is nestled in the permission to be figurative—the right to the metonym/synecdoche political performance of collectivity. I will give an example in a moment. But let me say here that this is where the humanities can reclaim a part of history for the "human" as it plays with qualitative social science. To mistake this for classical humanism is to ignore history and politics. The outlines of historiography must be contaminated if it wishes to continue as subalternist. Making something count is not counting things, on the way to quantification. (Quantification has won. The imaginative social sciences bite the dust more discreetly than the humanities, beggars at the global feast.)

I have said that the "singular," as it combats the universal-particular binary opposition, is not an individual, a person, an agent; multiplicity is not multitude. If, however, we are thinking of potential agents, when s/he is not publicly empowered to put aside difference and self-synecdochize to form collectivity, the group will take difference itself as its synecdochic element. Difference slides into "culture," often indistinguishable from "religion." And then the institution that provides agency is reproductive heteronormativity (RHN). It is the broadest and oldest global institution. You see now why just writing about women does not solve the problem of the gendered subaltern, just as chronicling the popular is not subaltern studies. In search of the subaltern I first turned to my own class: the Bengali middle class: Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri and Mahasweta Devi. From French theory that is all I could do. But I did not remain there. In the middle class, according to Partha Chatterjee, Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri was metaleptically substituting effect for cause and producing an idea of national liberation by her suicide. Chatterjee's argument is that an idea of national liberation was produced by so-called terrorist movements.²⁷ A daring and "Clytemnestra-like" project for a woman.

In the subsequent years the gendered subaltern, for me, kept moving down the social strata. Class is not the exact word here because we are speaking of an area beside capital logic. Relative autonomy does not apply here, first, because autonomy is a marked concept. Secondly, because, in the commonplace agential sense, there is minimal agential autonomy in engendered subalternity. My discussion of Mahasweta Devi's "Doulati

the Bountiful," in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, describes a literary representation of the female subaltern as holding up the rural economy.²⁸ This downward trajectory came to relate to home working, permanent casuals, more orthodox doubts of the Marxist analysis of the female laboring body as the agent of production.

As you can see, however, in what I am writing today, the problems that emerged out of "Can the Subaltern Speak?"—the problem of subjectship and agency, and the call to build "infrastructure" in the colloquial, not the Marxist sense, so that agency would emerge—have not left me. At that stage already, I saw agency as institutional validation, whereas subject formation exceeded the borders of the intending subject, to put it brutally briefly once again. And I saw reproductive heteronormativity (RHN) as the broadest global institution. Now, in addition, I see agency as the play of self-synecdochizing in a metonym. To "restore rights to the people" without laying the groundwork for this (political) will can be well-intentioned, but only that, and at best.

In general, the leaders of collectivities—"good" or "bad"—have the right to the metonym/synecdoche complex. That the rank and file do not sometimes gets overlooked. That I believe is the difference between "good" and "bad" movements. My foray into teacher-training for the subaltern is because they also are citizens, *the* name for hegemony. In order to work for them, I set aside my differences—Columbia Professor, dollar income, classed caste-birth, and all that comes with them. I synecdochize myself as nothing but a citizen of India, which is where my tribal students, their parents and relatives, and I can form a collectivity, in search of agency. On the other hand, they are not free to put aside their differences. The effort is to build infrastructure so that they can, when necessary, when the public sphere calls for it, synecdochize themselves. The solution, as I see it, is not to celebrate or deny difference, but find out what inequality brings about its use and who can deny it on occasion. The solution is also not to create "a politics of recognition" where this problematic is altogether ignored. The solution cannot come to us from the international civil society, distributing philanthropy without democracy.²⁹ I believe the existing debates about contingency and universality have not taken this into account.³⁰

Here is another example, from the other end of the spectrum. Donald Pease the Americanist was recently suggesting that in the wake of 9/11, with civil liberties constrained by the Patriot Act and the general atmosphere of suspicion and fear, the will of the citizen of the United States has become separated from the state.³¹ This too is a kind of subalternity because the part is no longer part of the whole, and therefore the power

to self-synecdochize has been taken away. Bruce Ackerman had suggested some years ago that "We the people" in the U.S. polity are not engaged on an ordinary day. It's only when there are transformative Supreme Court decisions and popular mandates that they act.³² And now Donald Pease was suggesting that even that has been changed. He, however, was not able to see that RHN kicks in here as well. Although the citizen is subalternized inside the nation-state—the United States—outside in the world agency is reclaimed, generally in the name of gender. Gender is the alibi for much U.S. violence abroad. That has as little persuasiveness for the thinking of subalternity as a position without identity as does gender-oppression in the name of cultural difference. "People" will play into both these extremes. If we grasp subalternity as a position without identity we will think of building infrastructure for agency. Ethical sameness cannot be compromised. The point is to have access to the situation, the metonym, through a self-synecdoche that can be withdrawn when necessary rather than confused with identity.

I always hesitate to talk about my teacher-training efforts. But, if I am going to suggest that the task is to take Hobsbawm a step further, to make the anthropologist construct her object as a teacher for a different end, learn to learn from below, *from* the subaltern, rather than only study him (her), I have to make an attempt. In a social science audience, I can call it "fieldwork." Then you can take a small example and people will not dismiss you. In a social science audience I can call it "case studies." It is a small undertaking going on for twenty-five years and it has its place in the movement of the subaltern as I am describing it. (The reader will remember the brutal eye-opener in the middle of it.) My project has become more and more not only to study the subaltern (always in the sense of "cut-off from lines of social mobility") but to learn (as from figuration—because I am a literary person) from them in order to be able to devise a philosophy of education that will develop, for want of a better expression (since I don't write about this fieldwork, generalizable phrases don't come immediately), the "habits of democratic behavior," or "rituals of democratic behavior," or "intuition of the public sphere." (To what end, I now ask, though I will not give up. In the Introduction I expressed a hope that from a subaltern intellectual may come ideas that will bear fruit. False hope?)

By now it should be clear that "insertion into the public sphere" means for me the effort to create the possibility of metonymizing oneself for making oneself a synecdoche, a part of a whole, so that one can claim the idea of the state belonging to one. That is a citizen: the state is in the citizen's service. This is hopelessly idealistic, especially in the context of a repressive state, in the current era of globalization where the state is more and

more reconfigured as not the agent of redistribution, but the agent of repression. The idea of relating to the state in a country as multilingual and multicultural, as many-leveled as India—and to a degree such differences exist everywhere—unless you want to go through nationalism/fascism, you must be able to metonymize/synecdochize yourself, understand the part by which you are connected to that abstract whole so that you can claim it. It's not even the right to metonymize oneself, but it's the possibility. This kind of work can only be a supplement to much more quick-fix, problem-solving work. But if it isn't there then subalternization remains in place and accounts of popular practice as political society remain constative.

This is where the responsibilities of borrowing Gramsci's word have brought me. It is the next stage of the work with a trajectory of the subaltern. Not to study the subaltern, but to learn. I'm a humanities teacher. I'm not a historian or an anthropologist. My disciplinary formation is to expand the capacity to learn and teach reading in the most robust sense—not only to classify, record, and describe. It is not a neat divide, but “scholarship” is more instrumental here. Therefore, the disciplinary doors of history and anthropology are closed to me. I have chosen a reading task: to learn from these collectivities enough to suture rights thinking into the torn cultural fabric of responsibility; or, to vary the concept-metaphor, activate a dormant ethical imperative. (I have quoted Gramsci's uncanny intuition of this on page 8.) The text is text-ile. To suture here is to weave, as in invisible mending.³³ The work takes me to the breakup of rural welfare in China, and the transformation of indigenous knowledge in South Africa. And this brings me to the new subaltern, about whom I have written elsewhere.³⁴

So far I have spoken of the old subaltern, withdrawn from lines of social mobility, in terms of an educational enterprise that in a supplementary way tries to release the possibility of self-abstraction, self-synecdoche. Merely trying to release the possibility—it won't happen in the classroom tomorrow. By infrastructure, I had earlier meant the effort to establish, implement, and monitor structures that allow subaltern resistance to be located and heard. In the interim years, through the electronic circuits of globalization, the subaltern has become greatly permeable. Much of a pastiche of “global” culture is lexicalized in a fragmentary fashion in the underclass public world. (To lexicalize is to separate a linguistic item from its appropriate grammatical system into the conventions of another grammar, as I have explained in Chapter 19, “Harlem,” in this book.) But the permeability I speak of is the exploitation of the global subaltern as source of intellectual property without the benefit of benefit sharing,³⁵

pharmaceutical patenting, and social dumping. This is the bottom edge of bio-politics. A little ownership of governmentality, persistently supplemented by aesthetic education, would be useful here! I take my lesson from the failure of the ownership of the means of production. Call it the Gramscian shift to civil society as poison/medicine if you like.

There is no permeability in the opposite direction. That is where the permanent effort of infrastructural involvement is called for. I am not speaking of organizing international conferences with exceptionalist “examples” of subalternity to represent collective subaltern will. The subaltern has no “examples.” The exemplary subaltern is hegemonized, even if (and not necessarily) in bad faith. This must be distinguished from the desperate and hardly perceptible effort at faking subaltern collecting initiative by the leaders of counter-globalist resistances. I have called it “feudality” without “feudalism.” I don't think it's a good idea at this point to take a real position against it, because I know where the desperation comes from.

Here too I will speak of tapping subjectship for the sake of agency, as in teacher training among the subaltern. For what we need is not only legitimate benefit sharing. We need also to prepare the field for sharing, however incomplete. Professor Hayden, whom I cite in note 35, speaks of Mexico. I have some experience of South Africa in terms of the transformation of indigenous knowledge into intellectual property. My limited experience would tell me that even as organizations such as the *Indigenous Knowledge Systems of South Africa Trust* are trying to make benefit-sharing equitable, they remain complicit with the idea that the transformation of indigenous knowledge systems into data is an unquestioned good. And that there need be no attention paid, beyond the descriptive attention of anthropology and archeology. The only alternative seems to be to say, “This is as good as what the heritage of the European world calls science.” I do talk about the problem with the Hindu nationalist claim, in India, that the ancient texts of the Vedas offer us “Vedic science.”³⁶ The problem of the Hindu Right is not that it cares for Vedic science, but that it uses it to prove that it is best, that it can oppress others in its name, that India belongs to it. The Hindu Right is not subaltern!³⁷ The traditional healers in South Africa cannot be immediately compared to the Bharatiya Janata Party, although the fear of religious violence should be always around the corner. From within the humanities, I want to claim the traditional healer's sense of all history as a big now; I want to claim the sense of myth as being able to contain history, and keep de-transcendentalizing belief into the imagination. I remain a “lonely gun-runner,” as I have heard myself described, turned into “permanent persuader,” now trapped in the

machine. Turn the traditional healers' performative into performance, not just transform it into data, was my hope, imitating Du Bois, but that too helps "development"—without an aesthetic education. The unintended consequence of it can also become an appropriation for religious fundamentalism, just as the intended consequence of the data transformation is exploitation. This is the cleft stick—the double bind—for the new subalternist.

To historicize the subaltern, then, is not to write the history of the singular. It is the active, scrupulous, and vigilant contamination of historiography from the constative through the disciplinary performative into the field of the historical possibility of what we can only call the present. Here the difference between the old and the new subaltern is only conjunctural. The category of the "popular" seems altogether tame when compared to this dynamic.

World Systems and the Creole

I BEGAN THIS PIECE with a reference to Didier Coste's idea that Comparative Literature should go back to Romantic aesthetics by way of classical comparativist universalism. I pointed out that my efforts were identical with his, with the difference of perspective generated by the inadequacies of the former. I believe it was Coste who had suggested that I should have written *Death of a Discipline* in Bengali. I also believe that we should attend to the "good" Euro-U.S. comparativists who are proposing solutions confronting the discipline. We are with them; they should not find us dangerous. In that spirit, I was delighted, in 2005, to have been asked to respond to a paper by Wai Chee Dimock, like me a Westernized Asian comparativist. Again in the spirit of establishing alliances, I sketched out first the broad points of solidarity between Dimock and myself and then pointed to some suggestions for the kind of future work that can arise out of this undertaking, different from Coste's more traditional one.

First I found common ground in our reaction to the encyclopedist and cartographic work of Franco Moretti: "I would like," Dimock wrote, "to caution against what strikes me as [Moretti's] overcommitment to general laws, to global postulates operating at some remove from the phenomenal world of particular texts." This resonated with what I had written in *Death of a Discipline*, although I was, admittedly, a little stronger: "The world systems theorists upon whom Moretti relies . . . are . . . useless for literary study that must depend on texture."¹ Thanks to initiatives such as Dimock's, we can begin to emphasize the altogether obvious point: in order to do distant reading one must be an excellent close reader. Close reading

for distant reading is a harnessing of aesthetic education for its own counter-example. We can call this a double bind, in keeping with the theme of this book. In the intervening years, what I have noticed is that the followers of Moretti often categorize by subject matter, but that was not part of that evening's discussion.

I also attempted to find common ground in Dimock's idea that "the epic is a cross-over phenomenon." I wanted to take this past simply noting the kind of intertextuality where a modern text clearly alludes to an ancient one, "encoding the temporal within the lexical," to quote Dimock. I suggested, as an example of this, that Maryse Condé's slim novel *Heremakhonon* deploys epic time in the management of narrative time. Clearly, with the disappearance of robust orality, the epic tendency could not just shrivel. Rather than call deliberately large-scale narrative undertakings "epic" by a species of descriptive metaphor of size and complexity, we could call Condé's attempt to train the memory of the reader by the impersonal heterogeneity of "historical" times a displacement of epic play. . . . Although I did not mention this at the time, you can see that this training is an aesthetic education in the "contemporaneity" of globalization. *Heremakhonon*, with its rich epic dimension—loosely named "Africa," "Islam," "decolonization," and the like (unitary names suppressing the plural epic as monoculture does biodiversity)—then opens the door closed by Aristotle when he compared the slim tragedy to the massive performative epic.² It is a large and generic door, closed when history, tied to the self-determination of the individual, began to be written on a gradual incomprehension of the miraculous *mnemic* scripting of orality. . . . To say that the timing of the text is hybrid is to learn to read its epic dimension and witness this acknowledgment.

In these three essays the tone is lighter. I am, after all, also a Comp Lit professor. Let's forget saving the world, how best do we do our job? We've had it with being dismissed as non-serious, poco presentist folks. So build bridges, agree where you can, but also make concrete suggestions. Here now is such a suggestion.

Dimock does not suggest, as do I, that in such use of narrative time, literature touches orature; but her argument can clearly take it on board. What in the more expanded argument confronts the scandal of Africa in globalization can here take a more teacherly stance. Comparative Literature has never treated the techniques of orature except formulaically. Is there another way?

For her distant reading, Dimock turns to anthropology as a model. I do of course most heartily endorse this move. Here I would like to elaborate

a little and again, I feel confident that Dimock's approach can take this on.³ I should mention that it is not really "literary anthropology" that Dimock uses as her model.

(My response was composed with reference to an earlier version of Dimock's essay. The phrase "literary anthropology" was used in its initial paragraphs:

"I was in Beijing a few weeks ago," she had then started, and was struck by a phrase that seemed to come up again and again even in the handful of articles that I happened to be reading: "literary anthropology." This is not a phrase we use very much in this country; in fact, with the exception of Wolfgang Iser, I don't recall seeing it anywhere else. I (would?) like to borrow it as a preface to this talk, as a summary and apology for the very immodest claim that I seem to be making; namely, that in order to think about the epic and the novel in conjunction, we need an analytic frame that has to be measured in terms of continents, an analytic frame that reflects, not the life of a single nation, and not the life of a single language, but something like the life of the species as a whole, in all its environments, all its habitats across the planet.

SET AND SUBSET

"Anthropology" is probably the right word for this kind of undertaking. Of course, as we know, the discipline has its own internal problems, not least of all being its long history of entanglement with colonialism and indeed racism of various sorts. But, as a discipline adjacent to and yet not reducible to literary history, it does serve as an interesting heuristic partner. One of the most important differences, it seems to me, is that anthropology is, by and large, an empirical discipline, and brings with it a self-consciousness about what we might call the conditions of its empiricism: the size of the sampling population, the scope of the claim that flows from it, and the extent to which it can be said to constitute a unit of analysis. It is this self-consciousness that allows anthropology to operate on two alternating and complementary registers, bouncing one off against the other: one macro and the other micro, one, much larger than the scale of literary history, and the other, much smaller. The smaller scale is obvious enough: anthropology is a study of local knowledge, it is dedicated to a self-contained population, a subset of human beings. But this subset matters, I think it is fair to say, because it is a subset, because there is a larger set to which it belongs. This larger set answering to the name of the "human" is the implicit but also indispensable ground of anthropology. It becomes a discipline at all because this larger set is a meaningful set, a meaningful unit of analysis. And the database that goes with it is coextensive with the life of the species as a whole; it extends to every part of the planet where human beings happen to be. It is this relation between set and subset and the coextension of the former with the bounds of the human that I'd like to map onto our own discipline. There is no reason why literary history should not be construed as being parallel to anthropology in this particular sense: committed both to a

local population and to an unlocal idea of species membership. There is no reason, in fact, why it should not work as a switch mechanism between these two, between a subset of human expression, and a species-wide definition of the set. The term that I'd like to propose for this switch mechanism is the term "genre."

I have kept my earlier comments because, although Dimock has now jettisoned literary anthropology and taken on fractal geometry to explicate Lévi-Strauss on kinship, her presuppositions about the relationship of literature to culture remain unchanged.

My point, which I keep repeating, is that I am one of them—five big names thinking to respond to a "crisis in Comparative Literature" rather different from the one that René Wellek was responding to: Pascale Casanova, Didier Coste, David Damrosch, Wai Chee Dimock, Franco Moretti.⁴ I also repeat my interested difference, to which it is not necessary to give a violent name, as does Coste. There is much greater violence in the "value-added" testing of teachers, where teaching is commoditized in terms of customer data, in terms of which teachers in the United States are judged and sacked.⁵ My difference is that these critics all want to classify in a cruder and less informed way than the old literary historical and generic classificatory attempts. My comments on the universalizability and generalizing characteristic of the literary have been sketched out all through the book.⁶ Here Dimock, opposing Moretti's encyclopedism, goes into a balance rather cruder than Schiller's and altogether less nuanced than Marx's differentiation between human and species.

I stumbled on the idea that imperialism was an "enabling violation" at least thirty years ago. Subsequent work willy nilly located our class, now global, as the beneficiary, not only by birth, but by other circumstances as well. I have never been able to think of descriptive arguments for counter- or alternative modernities as anything but specific to this amorphous "class." Globality can save us if we assert that everything now is what "modern"—not counter-, not alternative—is, and live up to the task of disciplinary revision. Not every "European" invented the steam engine, not every "American" the telephone. Capital is the mysterious motor; we fight its implacable choices epistemologically.)

"Literary anthropology" is the genre of anthropology that deploys autobiography powerfully—Lévi-Strauss on the Nambikwara, Mick Taussig in his various writings, James Clifford, Kiran Narayan.⁷ They are rather far from claiming the species as set. That gesture would belong more to what is today called physical anthropology, whose borders mingle with genetics. This too is not Dimock's terrain. It seems to us that Dimock is

using masterfully what Kant, in the opening of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, writes about fiction as a source of anthropological knowledge.⁸ Here, too, I declare alliance. When I began my post-colonial journey with "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," written in the early 1980s, I struck out for literature as "cultural self-representation."⁹ Dimock's insistence on close reading is faithful to Kant. In an appendix to *The Critique of Pure Reason* on the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason, Kant speaks of the making sense-perceptible of three basic ideas of conceptualizing logic. When doing so, Kant says, the investigating subject, the philosopher, takes the concept as a perspective, as on a hill, and sees a horizon, as a circle. The subject continues to develop the concept and finds more and more circles appear, newer horizons. When the case won't fit a circle, the seeker pushes the figure until it becomes an ellipse; and a parabola, and perhaps all the figures of geometry as a circle bent out of shape (Kant doesn't list them), until he (always a he in Kant, of course) comes upon the asymptote, two parallel lines running side by side, meeting only at infinity. You never get to empirical particularity when you are making logic palpable, says Kant, for the entire exercise is still only analogical.¹⁰

A merely reasonable system, such as the kind of analogical classification envisaged by distant reading, in other words, will not yield the singular.

Yet another point of entry for me is Virgil in the novels of J. M. Coetzee. Indeed, Virgil is in *Disgrace* as well, along with *King Lear* and Kafka's *The Trial*.

I will now make a tiny suggestion that will, at first, seem contrary to Dimock's conclusions. But in fact, it will lead to further work that can only secure her general argument, her claims to the world.

I would suggest that Latin is not a "foreign" language to Dante. The conversation between Virgil and Dante is in Latin, not in a foreign language. When Dante wrote *De vulgari eloquentia* in Latin, he referred to it as the language with a grammar.¹¹ All the various speeches that together make up "Italian" are simply vulgar (popular) speech—Latin creole, as it were—mutatis mutandis in the spirit of Proust's Marcel:

(The French words we are so proud of pronouncing accurately are themselves only "howlers" made by Gallic mouths in mispronouncing Latin or Saxon . . . the longstanding mutilations that our ancestors, by speech defects, the intonation of some ethnic vulgarity, or mispronunciation inflicted on Latin and Saxon words, in a way that later elevated them into the grammarians' noble statutes).¹²

In the Latin Middle Ages, even Provençal is not a foreign language, but another Latin creole. Out of all the "Italian" creoles, Dante chooses curial Florentine, the most elegant version of his beloved Tuscan, as the one most worthy. It is not too far-fetched to say that, for Dante, Latin is *sanskrit* (refined), and vulgar speech—all those "Italians"—is *prakrt* (natural). If we look at playwrights such as Bhasa (fl. third century CE) or Kalidasa (fl. fifth century CE), we find them using Sanskrit and at least three Prakrts (the vulgar eloquence out of which the languages of North India consolidated themselves, my mother tongue Bengali in the late eleventh century). I would therefore like to place this within a more general phenomenon of creolity rather than take Aristotle's casual mention of foreign words as my model as it was Dimock's. (Indeed, the passage on the capacity of the epic to extend its own bulk has nothing to do with foreign words and large kinship structures at all.) Aristotle was not keen on the epic, as the close of the *Poetics* will show. And in translations other than Else's, in the Loeb bilingual edition, for example, γλοττου is translated "rare words," rather than "foreign."¹³ My own inclination would be to follow the "wordy" authorized by the Greek-English Lexicon. The *Poetics* is as much a creative writing lesson as it is literary theory. Aristotle is cautioning future writers of tragedy against ponderous language.¹⁴ The epic can get away with heavy language. It is a vulgar narrative form. Be sure not to use such stuff in tragedy, drama with a socially therapeutic mission. I think it is not a good idea to draw a foreign language rule for works that are "epic" in a sense rather far from Aristotle's day. On the other hand, creolity, as I have sketched it above, is about the dellexicalization of the foreign. (To lexicalize is to separate a linguistic item from its appropriate grammatical system into the conventions of another grammar, as I have repeatedly reminded the reader of this book [see pages 406 and 583n.37].) It will yield us a history and a world.

(Dimock was conscientious enough to look up two specialist books on Dante, Latin, and Italian, in response to my gentle nudge. I am grateful to her for this. My point, however, was not to check up on scholarship, especially from the late 1950s, when some of the allochthonic metropolitan concepts I carry around had not yet reared their teratological heads. The point is to imagine a time when the name "Italian" is shaky—to imagine a different mind-set—dare I say episteme? I cite my postscript and remind the reader that, in my initial response, this is why I had quoted Proust, to be helped along in the task of imagining, an epistemological performance repeatedly called for in global "contemporaneity." I quote myself quoting Rilke, in a piece where I wrote of the Indic episteme

(structure of feeling?) that gives us avatar, as not grasped by experts or filmmakers.¹⁵

It is within this general uneven unanticipatable possibility of avatarana or descent—this cathexis by the ulterior, as it were, that the "lesser" god or goddess, when fixed in devotion, is as "great" as the greatest: *ein jeder Engel ist schrecklich*. How did Rilke know? Perhaps "culture" is semi-permeable by the imagination? Am I not cynical enough about Comparative Literature? *Mea maxima culpa*. I still go by Shelley's warning, always apposite [but now historicized and politicized, as you now have seen in the Introduction and Chapter 4, "The Double Bind Starts to Kick In"]: "We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know.")

Dimock's work invites us to look beyond Latin into the word "genre." The Indo-European cognates in Sanskrit yield us both "gnosis" and "genesis," and in Sanskrit we find *jnana*, "gnosis," but also *jati* and *jnati*, "nation" and "kin." All these words are related to the word for knee, *janu*, *genoux*, use of gender (another genre word) as rape, kneeling into forcible entry, to engender.

This is what makes me a bit leery of the model of family: father, mother, competitive patricidal brothers, sisters emerging as support. No kinship system, alas, is composed only of cousins, as Dimock would have it. Yesterday I listened to my dear old friend Lord William Wallace of Saltire deliver to us his response to the question posed by the Catholic Conference of Bishops and the Archbishop's Conference of the Church of England: Is there a "European" war? What we heard was a model of trusteeship, of protecting non-European peoples as they make the transition into modernity, not the white man's burden, Wallace insisted. This fraternocracy takes us on to the family tree, which Nietzsche and Foucault had revised. I feel such a strong bond with Dimock's work that I would ask her to rethink family as creolity.

(Dimock has loosened the concept of family a good deal in the second version. I am grateful for this, but I would ask her to give it up altogether. "Rhizome" is a good choice and, to see how one can leave family behind via the rhizome's dismantling of the root, I invoke creolity again. There is a short checklist in my postscript. The French postcolonials mentioned there go a long way with the rhizome, away from "the family of man."¹⁶

In order to get away from the family romance, Dimock goes to fractal geometry. I am as suspicious of humanists metaphorizing the latest developments in science through their pseudo-popularizing descriptions as I am of nonspecialists offering Mesopotamia as evidence. I will not call the repeatable universalizable difference in singularity a "strange attractor"

from chaos theory as does the self-help book that I use to keep my blood pressure under control.¹⁷ This sort of irresponsible analogizing leads to pretentiousness in our students. Do we really need fractal geometry to tell us “the loss of detail is almost always unwarranted?” I keep insisting on learning languages, the old access to literary detail, rather than analogizing from descriptions of fractal geometry or chaos theory. What warms the cockles of my old-fashioned heart is that Dimock will not give up close reading, however far she fetches to justify it within the current rage for filing systems.)

I mentioned Kafka and Shakespeare, not just Virgil, in Coetzee. If we take creolity and intertextuality (rather than kinship connections and genre) as models that coexist with Dimock’s rethinking of the epic and the novel, we can welcome *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* into the enclosure. In “Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching” (Chapter 15 in this book), I have suggested that you can even welcome Rabindranath Tagore.

Perhaps this expansion of Dimock’s point of view, as expressed by me, already happens in her next book. For now, I will say that “The Law of Genre,” the Derrida text from which Dimock quotes, will allow this. The figure that Derrida offers, over against the border policing that he and Dimock repudiate, is “invagination,” where a part insistently becomes bigger than the whole. In creolity one can find a persistent invagination that will make room for our alliance.

In conclusion, I offer a bit of an abject postscript for my word “planet.” I made Jonathan Arac change his over-enthusiastic blurb for me as the proponent of “planetary comparative literature” to a description of me as trying to be a “planetary reader.” Here I give my reasons, which will repeat what Chapter 16, “Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet,” lays out in full. I spoke of planetarity in an address to a Swiss organization—Stiftung-Dialogik—in 1997. They had been formed to give shelter to refugees from the Third Reich. In the mid-1990s they were changing to accommodate refugees from various countries of Asia and Africa, torn asunder by violence and poverty. To mark this change, they asked me to offer a keynote. I was asking them to change their mind-set, not just their policy. And I recommended planetarity because “planet thought opens up to embrace an inexhaustible taxonomy of such names including but not identical with animism as well as the spectral white mythology of post-rational science.” By “planet-thought” I meant a mind-set that thought that we lived on, specifically, a planet. I continue to think that to be human is to be intended toward exteriority. I have repeated this in many ways in this

book. And, if we can get to planet-feeling, the outside or other is indefinite. Therefore I wrote (see page 339), more or less:

If we imagine ourselves as planetary accidents rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us, it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away—and thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. My efforts for the last two decades tell me that, if we ask the kinds of questions you are asking, seriously, we must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mind-set.

To explain: If we planet-think, planet-feel, our “other”—everything in the unbounded universe—cannot be a self-consolidating other, an other that is a neat and commensurate opposite of the self. I emphasize “education” in the passage above, and I mean specifically training the imagination, “aesthetic education,” here reduced to Comp Lit in the classroom. Gifted folks with well-developed imaginations can get to it on their own. The experimental musician Laurie Anderson, when asked why she chose to be artist-in-residence at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, put it this way: “I like the scale of space. I like thinking about human beings and what worms we are. We are really worms and specks. I find a certain comfort in that.”

She has put it rather aggressively. That is not my intellectual style, but my point is close to hers. You see how very different it is from a sense of being the custodians of our very own planet, for god or for nature, although I have no objection to such a sense of accountability, where our own home is our other, as in self and world. But that is not the planetarity I was talking about.

Planetarity, then, is not quite a dimension, because it cannot authorize itself over against a self-consolidating other. In that mind-set, there is no choosing between cultures. It is the place of “unaccommodated man,” to use Shakespeare’s words, which I thought Coetzee’s Lucy gendered: “a poor, bare forked animal.”

If I seem hesitant about claiming the planet, I also have a cautionary word about harnessing Mesopotamia. I insist that I share these precautions with Dimock because I feel a strong alliance with her. As a modernist, I too feel the need to approach the medieval and ancient worlds. If I remind ourselves that a string quartet and a spider must not be conceptually related because they both have eight legs, it is because I too have indulged in making preposterous connections. As I have tried to point

out in the cases of Aristotle and the epic, and Dante and Latin, people in different historical periods think differently, they inhabit different epistememes. We cannot take the English word "foreign" as a felicitous synonym for the word *ἄλλοτιον* spoken by Aristotle to his students and use it to construct a world system. (There is evidence that Aristotle thought he was himself a "stranger" because he was from Stagira, whereas Plato was a citizen of Athens. How does "foreign" figure here?) We cannot read if we do not make a serious linguistic effort to enter the epistemic structures presupposed by a text. Aristotle and Dante are far enough from us, but Mesopotamia is quite another story. The responsibility of the comparativist entails a greater familiarity with the language(s) and patterns of thought of that remote theater than our elation at finding "foreign" elements everywhere—that allows us to repeat what may be a bit of a literary-critical cliché—the epic as world system.

Some years ago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York had an extraordinary exhibition on the "Art of the First Cities." The exquisite objects gave us a glimpse of a comparativism before the letter, a world system before our world. I remember reading of an extraordinary linguistic phenomenon in that distant world:

[At the Old Babylonian Schools] the students were not simply learning the technique of calligraphy but were also studying Sumerian, a language that had long ceased to be spoken and that bore no resemblance to the Akkadian they spoke at home. . . . The language was long dead and was a typical "nonmother tongue," taught by old men to young boys who would hardly ever get to use it outside the school environment.¹⁸

How would a simple idea of "foreign" be negotiated in this space?

Postscript

When I proposed creolity rather than kinship as a model for comparativist practice to Dimock, I was thinking of Dante and Latin. It was clear to me that, for a very long time, the idea of one normative language and many "natural" ones was a much more powerful idea than the accident of there being many languages. When Ibn Rushd was translating Aristotle, he was not translating from a foreign language because to earn the right to translate was for him to make the language of the original his own. Marx was catching the tail end of this idea in his injunction about how to learn a foreign language in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte."¹⁹ I felt that it would be good if we thought of the great order of the literary as a kind of virtual and inaccessible normativity, and of our own methodological attempts as varieties of creole, testifying to their prac-

tical usefulness. Revising, I consulted the basic texts of the contemporary debate on creolity.²⁰ The entire debate is worth contemplating. Here I will content myself with citing Édouard Glissant, the initiator of the movement. Glissant's word for what I am seeking to describe is "relation." To generalize this notion he writes, among a thousand provocative things, for example:

Let us try to recapitulate the things we don't yet know, the things we have no current means of knowing, concerning all the singularities, all the trajectories, all the histories, all the denaturations, and all the syntheses that are at work or that have resulted from our confluences. How have cultures—Chinese or Basque, Indian or Inuit, Polynesian or Alpine—made their way to us, and how have we reached them. . . . No matter how many studies and references we accumulate (though it is our profession to carry out such things properly), we will never reach the end of such a volume; knowing this in advance makes it possible for us to dwell there. Not knowing this totality does not constitute a weakness. . . . Relation is open totality; totality would be relation at rest. Totality is virtual.²¹

My affinity with Glissant's thinking should be immediately clear. Glissant's work is particularly useful as an antidote to the understandable but unfortunate comparativism that wants to begin with the "fact" that "literatures the whole world over were formed on the national model created and promoted by Germany at the end of the 18th century."²² Here too I concur with Édouard Glissant's wisdom, warning non-Europeans from joining in this contrived collectivity: "if one is in too much of a hurry to join the concert, there is a risk of mistaking as autonomous participation something that is only some disguised leftover of old alienations"; he gives an astute account of the kind of comparativism the enthusiasts of world literature would require: "In order to 'comprehend' and thus to accept you, I have to bring your solidity to the ideal scale which provides me with themes for comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce."²³ An unintended consequence of work such as Dimock's can be to give support to such "interaction, out of which ghouls of totalitarian thinking might suddenly reemerge." I hasten to add that I have a great deal of sympathy with Professor Casanova, from whom I cited that symptomatic sentiment about the originality of the German eighteenth century. I caution her simply because I have learned the hard way how dangerous it is to confuse the limits of one's knowledge with the limits of what can be known, a common problem in the academy.

We cannot not want to tie up all the loose threads in any world. Yet today more than ever that desire must be curbed, for everything seems

possible in the United States now. If we want to preserve the dignity of that strange adjective “comparative” in comparative literature, we will embrace creolity. Creolity assumes imperfection, even as it assures the survival of a rough future. In the creolization of the world’s past, comparativists of all stripes can hang out together. Join us.

The Stakes of a World Literature

For Ralph Cohen

IF FRANCO MORETTI is hard control, Didier Coste and Wai Chee Dimock are soft control and so is David Damrosch. I wanted to work with these colleagues rather than be defined as an outsider, and this was a paper I presented, initially in Istanbul, in David’s presence, in an effort at a dialogue, just as I had done so with Dimock in 2005. Charles Bernheimer, in his response to the 1997 ACLA report, had suggested “that multiculturalist comparatism begins at home with a comparison of oneself to oneself,” figuring out the hybrid elements in any investigating self and comparing the histories in a literary way.¹ Didier Coste had, as we have seen, asked us to go back to the “cautious multiculturalism” of “classical comparative literature” in search of acceptable universalisms. Dimock recommended a swing between worldwide close reading and literary anthropology. Casanova gave us a reality check and told us that literature began in the European eighteenth century. Franco Moretti gave us encyclopaedist distant reading in the face of a global knowledge explosion. These colleagues were trying, yet all were bound in the double bind of Europe as guide to disciplinary objectivity and “Europe” as these investigators’ national origin. (In the case of Dimock and Spivak, the “colonial subjectship” comes into play at “European origin.”) I have done no more than make the double bind fully visible and signaled a loss of hope. To students I suggest Wellek, from the outskirts of Europe, writing something that can be expanded, though class-bound, as Asia and Africa attempted to expand Marx. (But look at what happened there without the Gramscian supplementary role of aesthetic education for the subaltern. Mao’s monstrous cultural revolution was a simulacrum of Gramsci’s insight into epistemological labor.) Here is Wellek:

The only right conception seems to me a resolutely "holistic" one which sees the work of art as a diversified totality, as a structure of signs which, however, imply and require meanings and values. Both a relativistic antiquarianism [World Literature?] and an external formalism [distant reading?] are mistaken attempts to dehumanize literary study. Criticism [epistemological performance?] cannot and must not be expelled from literary scholarship.²

Embroided in academic politics, Wellek opposed what gives us the instrument of ab-use: the critique of "humanism" that saw it as phallogocentrism, fratrocenrism. That tradition continues in Bernheimer, who takes nothing else from Wellek. We must rescue him from the teaching machine, and remember that he is combating the nationalism and patriotism coming in after the two great wars of the twentieth century:

A cultural power politics is recommended [by Ernst Robert Curtius]: everything serves only the strength of one's nation. I am not suggesting that the patriotism of these scholars was not good or right or even high-minded. I recognize civic duties, the necessity of making decisions, of taking sides in the struggles of our time. I am acquainted with Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, his *Ideology and Utopia*, and understand that proof of motivation does not invalidate the work of a man.

Wellek also sees this as an opposition and goes for "internal formalism" as does Schiller for balance. I'm not a man, I'm not afraid of invalidation any more. I'm not only a woman—de Man's Schiller was already there—but an old woman.³ I try to recognize that "making decisions" and "internal formalism" are in a double bind that can never be solved, but protects decision making if the world is right; but our world is out of joint with globalization. Some of the projects above will be appropriated by the dominant for the politically correct ghetto. Let us consider this a frame for my olive branch to my colleague and friend: David Damrosch.

This is a practical text as it inhabits my work and life. I dedicate the text to Nimai Lohar, the only illiterate member of the rural poor vanguard with whom I work in India. In the spoken forum, I sing a line from a folk song that this man sang for me during my December 2008 visit to the schools. Because he is illiterate, Nimai still sings, but is embarrassed to do so in front of the others. We cannot read this as "subaltern literature." It is a song that Nimai has learned as part of his cultural conformity. He interprets it well, but not in a surprising way. The line that I sing goes: *Mon kore uribar toreya, bidhi dey na pakha*. A careless translation would go: I wish to fly but fate gives me no wings. Carefully and literally, it would go: my mind makes for flying, but—and then the word *bidhi*, which can

mean "law," "justice," as well as "fate/God"—*bidhi* does not give wings. I sing and read it because it can also describe our own stakes in world literature.

Kant said that the concept of the world in general is a regulative idea of merely speculative reason. We are able to think that every experiencing being, perhaps even animals, assumes a world. On the model of Walter Benjamin's effort to understand language, I could make up a corresponding title: "World as Such and the Worlds of Experiencing Beings."⁴ Such efforts are not much more than a method of inquiry that makes us feel we are avoiding assuming a world *and* self as self-evident ground for empirical inquiry. This needs to be made more precise, but for lack of preparation I will take the next step. Let us remember that in this method of inquiry, we take a step backward.

Upon this uncertain ground hardly secured by our method of inquiry, the English word "literature" is not yet useful. Nor are all its romance homonyms, securely placed in German *Literatur*, for historical reasons that we cannot consider here. All the translations of this word into other languages are part of the object of investigation, not yet instruments for it. Please mark my repeated use of "not yet." The dispute between Steven Owens and Rey Chow, cited in David Damrosch's book, does not attend to this "not yet."⁵ They transform it into an "either-or" and lose the thread of thought before it can be secure in its insecurity.

Not only are the European words for "literature" not yet useful when we take the backward steps necessary for this type of inquiry, even the claims made by the "great non-western" civilizations, of historically having had words that could have, or did, serve the same, similar, or better functions than "literature" in the European context, become less than useful, here and now. And indeed here the Rey Chows and the Steven Owens of the current dispute show their sharing of a similar set of values. For the counter-claims of the diasporas to the status of "literature" in the current situation are also not yet useful.

Let us rather try to think of a space filled by what is neither reason nor unreason yet seems irreducible. This is of course the space, literally, of dreams, that most literal of texts that help experiencing beings fill up the gaps in presupposing a world. Can one even think of this space as that between what experiencing beings can make and what they need? The irreducible filling up of this space has been a site of struggle that we call history and culture simply because there seems to be change constituted here and grounded in the shape of a struggle. There is no subsistence hunting, no subsistence gathering, no subsistence farming, no subsistence economy. A repeatable difference inhabits each: the irreducible difference

between needing and making. As I sought to strike a keynote, a low tone that will sound behind and while and ahead, for a conference in Istanbul, I asked the Turkey- or U.S.-centered audience to think this shape as not only ever-different but also ever-repeatable. Thus it is not only history but also singularity, in the strictest sense given us by post-Spinozan thought. Here the human differentiates itself from the animal by proposing belief. That space of difference, between how much the experiencing being can make and how much need, is filled with belief, in a simulacrum of reason. It is here that the line between human and animal is made to waver. (That is the space where the "creative," the excess—from capital to art—lodges. Belief closes this off, and yet cannot close it fully—always open to (de-)transcendentalization by the imagination, trained or untrained.) This is religion. I would like to believe, from what little I know of the world I assume, that the economy of belief and wonder (for want of a better word) is a characteristic of the definitive predication of a chunk of the experiencing being; it can and has become a tug-of-war, a battle, battles, wars. The economy itself is the mark of what we here today can call literature and hope to be understood, whatever that might mean. This economy marks the arrogance of the French eighteenth century, even greater than the German Orientalism of the same period. Of that more later.

If the literary is grasped by way of this intuition, Sheldon Pollack's comment shows its dangerous pathos.⁶ For him, as for me, the intuition of literature comes from what I would like to believe, from what little I know of the world I assume. This is because the assumption of a world in order to distinguish the agent of assumption from other experiencing beings becomes deeply personal, even when and as always it must embrace all persons and beings. The first step out of worldliness and the make-need difference, then, is also the first instrument of humanism, of all sorts. Discourses of worldliness are autobiographical in genre and confessional in institution, even when their interest is exactly not so.⁷

Some years ago I spoke in Istanbul about Edward Said's luminous book *Orientalism* and pointed at that important sentence: "Much of the personal investment in this study derives from my awareness of being an 'Oriental' as a child growing up in two British colonies."⁸ Out of that autobiographical confession, Said spends a lifetime constructing and criticizing the making and breaking of world literatures, though he never points at the narrative of de-Ottomanization.

Let us now look at David Damrosch. He begins his book with a splendid scholarly intention: "What follows is an essay in definition, a celebration of new opportunities, and a gallery of cautionary tales" (WWL, p. 36).

But in the end he comes around to our way of acknowledging the instrumentality of world literature, its role in assuring us a special place in the space of experiencing beings: "I have given you my world literature, or at least a representative cross-section of it. . . . Different readers will be obsessed by very different constellations of texts" (WWL, p. 281). I want to keep emphasizing that even this pattern, many steps down from Kant's stark world, is upstream from the story of colonialism's (Goethe) and capitalism's (Marx) insistence on world literature.

What I have been describing is that to define world literature is to be part of a description, the description of stakes emerging. Pascale Casanova's work, and I mention her because she is a model here, is consonant with the spirit of the French eighteenth century, which gains its greatest strength from a resolute unconcern for the neutralizing of the insecure grounds of security, although not invariably. Thus world literature, in my loosening of those words, is an event that continues to escape the experiencing being as it shapes itself as a "task" within this frame, which is also itself a task. When I presented a keynote entitled "Subduing Byzantium," at a conference in Pécs, Hungary, a self-styled "borderless" city which, with Istanbul and a city in the Ruhr, whose name escaped me as I was writing, not really like Auerbach in Turkey, in Ranigram village in Birbhum where my only mechanical aid was that hurricane lantern that I mention so often in my work, was going to be the European cultural capital. Erfurt, I think. Derrida had been a frequent visitor to Pécs, so they described the necessity to neutralize the event as "pushing back *différance*." Here at least, neutralizing the event is seen as an ongoing task, the task of seeing secured origins as secure. To speak a language that is not yet obscure everywhere, this means to ignore the transcendental deduction rather than persistently de-transcendentalize it. You cannot euter a certain Europe any other way. Locke already knew this (PR, p. 231). In my response to the audience in Hungary, I said, as indeed I said to the audience in Istanbul, cultural capitals of the United States of Europe, if only for a day or year: "Is our obligation to challenge '*différance*' to be taken as task or event? Are the Balkans and Europe an adequate allegory of East-West? Or are these three cultural capitals yet another undoing of Byzantium?" Seen as task, this is the securing of security that comes from the empiricization of certain philosophical contingencies that turned figure/logic into history and gave us "Europe," the "United States," "the globe." I have called this an enabling violation for a very long time. I heard Orhan Pamuk in his conversation with Andreas Huyssen in New York say that entering Europe will make Turkey more tolerant. At the World Philosophy Day organized by UNESCO, I heard Professor Aminata Diaw Cissé of

Senegal say, after an elaborate paper on Rousseau, that to ignore the French eighteenth century was to deny the gender freedom that came to Muslim women through such a European alliance. I understood these positions; I even agree. I was horn before Indian independence, and my last visit to India was in the wake of the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. Nearly three decades ago, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," I excoriated the Hindus and praised the British for good juridico-legal reforms in the interest of gender. But the question of world literature—what is neither reason nor unreason yet seems irreducible—is exactly to supplement persistently this necessary security for agential practice of a certain model. Supplement: to fill a lack and to add. "Literature" (what is neither reason nor unreason yet seems irreducible)—persistent task for the experiencing being. Step back.

Luca Scarantino, the Italian philosopher in the School of Preti, has tried to understand cultural difference in terms of how different cultural traditions have historicized the transcendental.⁹ This is an ambitious and good effort in tracking the securing of the unsecurable, although still within the enclosure that secures the human in the name of history alone. This must rely on the distinctions, themselves remote from the speculations with which we began, between cultures, with Europe as the "tolerant" mediator. Comparable is the reliance upon the distinction between *national* literatures and "world" or "comparative" literatures, itself remote from the speculations with which we began, which the question "What is World Literature?" must presuppose. In effect, both David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir's work asks "What is the world of World Literature," in their different ways, and can take on a questioning of the assumption that there are nations, nations based on languages, and therefore based on literatures. At one end, of course, we have Hannah Arendt's careful critique of these assumptions on the basis of the European experience after World War II.¹⁰ But above and beyond, we have Africa. The question of Africa, unfortunately, gives the lie to our thinking if we want to define it as definition, even description; although not if we think of it as contemplating stakes, *l'enjeu*. An empirical consideration of the history of colonialism in Africa shows the contingency of our assumption about nations. As a non-specialist, I have found A. Adu Boahen's *African Perspectives on Colonialism*, with its rich maps and tenacious text, immensely useful.¹¹

Both Franco Moretti and David Damrosch, different as they are in their ways of thinking, cite Goethe and Marx together in the matter of world literature. I would like to point at a difference. In spite of his determination by colonialism and capitalism, upon which Damrosch comments with panache, Goethe is able, I think, to imagine the aporetic na-

ture of world literature. Marx is not. For Goethe, the category of "world literature" is in the mode of "to come." Not for Marx. "National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World literature is at hand, and every one *must strive* to hasten its approach" (*Nationalliteratur will jetzt nicht viel sagen, die Epoche der Weltliteratur ist an der Zeit, und jeder muss jetzt dazu wirken, diese Epoche zu beschleunigen*), says Goethe, open ended. "From the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature" (*aus den vielen nationalen und lokalen Literaturen bildet sich eine Weltliteratur*), says Marx, secure.¹² What imagination can surmise, scientific socialism cannot.

Let me now spend some minutes on Marx's problem.

Gramsci's hope (see pages 9–10):

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, . . . but in active participation in practical life, . . . superior to the abstract mathematical spirit; from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains [a] "specialist" and does not become [a] "leader" (specialist+politico).¹³

Marx's mistake was to think that the workers' self-interest would decline if the secret of social productivity were revealed. Some had thought that the solution lay in ethical instruction. It was Gramsci's genius to understand that the point was to deconstruct Marx by inserting the lever in Thesis Three and epistemologizing the project: instrumentalizing the new intellectual to produce a "revolutionary" subject as proletario-subaltern intellectual, so far invariably lost in the vanguardism of the immediate aftermath of revolutions. A disinterested episteme can allow and withstand the interruption of the ethical. Study humanism, said Gramsci, in somewhat the same spirit as some of us say deep language learning and literary textuality train the ethical reflex. Because he was educated into a humanism, Foucault could write, supporting Nietzsche, that liberty is a by-product of oppression, thus emphasizing our conviction (not taken into account by Marx) that freedom from does not lead directly to freedom to, or to gloss it, leads to freedom to claim rights; to think of responsibility as a freedom, you need that very humanist education which teaches rebellion against it.¹⁴ Indeed, there is no freedom but freedom from, determined by oppression. Rights are bound to occasions.¹⁵ Freedom to responsibility is in a double bind with aesthetic education. It is in a structureless structure with the ethical.¹⁶

You notice that Gramsci's injunction will travel far in today's context, when Marx's abstract average (or quantification) has stepped fully into

the arena of the political. The data-form is now the preferred form of value, I have argued elsewhere.¹⁷ Hardt and Negri have filled this form with the possibility of a worldly conversation and action that fills the space of the thought where reason cohabits with something that is not-quite not-unreason. I have argued the difficulty of this in the Introduction. Gramsci's words—that just the mathematical intuition is not enough—sound the warning about confidence in the secured unsecured as secure that underlies scientific world-literaturism. Yet the phrase “humanist history” is not fully acceptable, even if it is the site of the double bind inhabited in a generally unacknowledged way by all the critics that I have just indicated. (An aesthetic education might displace you into a Captain Ahab or a Senanayak.) Gramsci was not a philosopher, at least not in the time allowed him, and in the circumstances that were his lot, capable of stepping altogether backward. But he certainly knew that grounds apparently secured by the heritage of the great European revolution needed to be loosened. (Here comparing *Latinitas* with Sanskrit education is a forgetfulness that we are looking at notes, and an inability or refusal to place a prevailing sentiment within the precarious unfinished scaffolding of the entire life.)¹⁸ We must read Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* knowing that he was writing a kind of shorthand. With this appreciation of the protocols of Gramsci's writing after 1926, I have been trying to open up the phrase “humanist history” beyond its own confines, so that it can be the light that goes a little way into the place where, to quote my Hungarian friends, difference is pushed back and back and “World Literature” ceases to have its homely specificity.

In the Introduction I have considered at length Gramsci's “techno-scientific” knowledge, “superior to mathematical abstraction.” I have pointed there at Gramsci's implicit realization that Marx's humanist education provided him with an understanding of free sociality that created a double bind with the uniquely Marxian meaning of the social. It arises from the “double character” of labor, that as abstraction it can be exchanged, consumed, and produce more (surplus) value, whereas as personal use-value it produces an object that is consumed and extinguished, is the “jumping-off point” (*Springpunkt*) around which an understanding of political economy turns, and resides in the subsequent homeopathy or medicine/poison double-character (*pharmakon*) of labor quantification (“abstract average” in Marx), based on this understanding, I have pointed out that Marx did not theorize the subject of this homeopathy. Why should the agent of the “social” as quantification used for agential freedom of intention from capitalism devote their freed intention to the building of a welfare society, where the “social” is understood, by Marx and

Marxists, in a general humanistic sense? The impulse to build a just society in a humanistic as well as aesthetically trained way is lodged in the play of the word “social”—on the one hand the ferociously original adjective *gesellschaftlich* or *vergesellschaftet* in the sense of an association based on labor quantified as *pharmakon* and, on the other hand the fuzzy noun, openly inhabits that “literary” space—the space between need and capacity to make. Indeed, the only common thing in the double bind, what makes it a double bind, in fact, is this space. It was Marx's genius to have seen that capital arises here as well. This is where Gramsci steps in. He wants to connect the proletarian and subaltern intellectual as inhabitants of this shared space.

Gramsci, I suggest in the Introduction, was right in thinking the project epistemological. One must attend upon the interruption of the ethical. It cannot be part of a plan directly. This conclusion I have amplified a bit above.

When I was among the respondents to a brilliant presentation by Professor Casanova, I had used two other bits of Gramsci. One was the thought of the “organic intellectual,” intellectuals continuous with a certain mode of production of value. If globalization is understood as re-structuring in order to establish the same system of exchange, the argument embraces all of us. I had also used Gramsci's insistence that historical and comparative grammars are always a site of struggle—an account of what wins—suggesting that Gramsci's “language” can easily be read as “literature,” to develop the analogy. The passage is worth reading again.¹⁹

It is always exciting to choose the winning side. For students of literature in Turkey, I had reminded my audience in Istanbul, there is a particular poignancy in this as Osmanli nostalgia is reterritorialized as European triumphalism, recoded in turn as the sobriety and responsibility of participating in the establishment of a world standard by way of the French and German eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the U.S. twenty-first.

Damrosch's book is full of moments that acknowledge the double bind of such projects not only with such projects but what that space of difference between making and reading can perhaps offer us as experiencing being—the possibility of a humanism, always to come—as Goethe rewrites Marx before the letter. Since it is no secret that capital rises in that space as well, the relationship between the apparent nationalism of capital and the wealth of languages in the world can be one of supplementarity rather than quantification—Greenwich Mean Time, give up close reading, and so on. Damrosch describes the United States this way:

“formerly provincial and now metropolitan” (WWL, pp. 27–28). Between “provincial” and “metropolitan” is Gramsci’s space of struggle, which Damrosch hardly erases. I walk with him to pull him back into it.

He is ready to be pulled for, if I understand *What Is World Literature?*, it proposes that some texts qualify as “world literature” for a variety of reasons, among them a sort of archetypal unity in humankind. We tell the same stories. But in order to learn to recognize this, says Damrosch, you must learn history and languages. Not just “technique-as-science,” but a “humanistic conception of history.” A good creed that points at a level playing field in a selective past when the present builds itself on false promises. Of course, my point (and Gramsci’s) is that what is selected out is the space of subalternization that must be disavowed for a polity to function.

For me, the best reason for walking with David Damrosch is his plea for collectivity. For me, the “philosophico-literary”—the aesthetic in aesthetic education—is the means for persistently attempting collectivities to come. Our stakes are not identical, but I keep hoping that they can walk together. Here is Damrosch: “It is far from clear how to proceed if we want to broaden our focus beyond one or two periods or national traditions: who can really know enough to do it well?” (WWL, p. 284).

Rabindranath Tagore seems to have made it into world literature. Asked a hundred years ago to speak, precisely, on Comparative Literature, he changed the phrase to “world literature”—*bishsho shahitto*—because “Comparative Literature” translated literally as a phrase is ridiculous in Bengali.²⁰ I wish there were time to relate this to the Owens-Chow dispute. I will simply say that in that essay, Tagore, usually uninterested in left politics, offers two metaphors, striking workers and *bajey khoroch*—literally bad spending—in everyday conversation wasting money, in Tagore’s hands undoubtedly wasting resources. I have a full-length essay in Bengali on this subject, but that will not travel. I throw this metaphor into your hands and suggest that perhaps Tagore is hinting exactly at a way of turning around the use of that space of difference from “social” as useful quantification to “social” as human welfare where Marx failed, putting “world literature” in an unachieved present. Except this is a different kind of turnover, for we are not speaking of the proper use of the social productivity of capital. Tagore is proposing, dare I say it, a species of potlatch to fill that space. To recode the potlatch is one way of describing the stakes of world literature. Another is to rediscover tragedy as an important genre. Not to say fate has given us wings, so we are flying. Monty Python had given us a version of *Waiting for Godot* where Godot

arrives on a bus. Let us discover how the exuberance of global literature can learn to say *bidhi dayna pakha*.

Thinking gender at the end is often my custom because reproductive heteronormativity is the world thing with which we have always secured the space between making and need. The child as excess has assured the father an immortality of which the mother has been the custodian. Here, too, it can help us to think the recoding we are imagining, women’s work, even now, even here.²¹ Indeed, one of the problems with the field of world literature studies is that it is not often attendant to gendering.

Gender is our first instrument of abstraction.

Let us look back upon the working definition of culture offered in “Culture: Situating Feminism” (Chapter 5): Culture is a package of largely unacknowledged assumptions, loosely held by a loosely outlined group of people, mapping negotiations between the sacred and the profane, and the relationship between the sexes. There and in the Introduction, I have tried to explain how gender-abstraction institutes and sustains “culture.” With the help of that explanation, I have read an uncharacteristic locating of the feminine by Paul de Man in Schiller’s speculation about the aesthetic. I have attempted to turn this into an allegory of our work of reading and training the imagination for epistemological performance. I have suggested that this can perhaps be achieved in the mode of “to come,” if we try, again and again, to reverse and displace the ancient binary until “woman” is a position without identity. I cannot replay the entire scenario here. I hope you will recall those moves and, in a gesture of activist reading, compute that this is also how Gramsci’s shorthand phrase “humanist history” can be expanded in today’s context, and this is how we must instrumentalize ourselves as the new intellectuals in the hope of a good world in the aporetic mode of “to come.” In a previous book I announced a death, and here I announce a hopelessness—we cannot achieve a world literature that we must hope for, because life and hope are too easily claimed by the camp of mere reason. To repeat, then, sabotaging Schiller takes a historically “gendered” shape. You will be surprised how often I have to remember this as the savage turf-battles within the humanities buffet my everyday.

It would have been appropriate to end my walk with David Damrosch with the passage from Derrida’s *Rogues* that I had quoted in the Introduction. But now that Verso wants a book called “Against World Literature: On Untranslatability in Comp Lit,” that too is claimed, by the book business, the machine that claims these words as well, of course. I quote Derrida’s words nonetheless: “It remains to be known, so as to save the honor of reason, how to *translate*. For example, the word *reasonable*.

And how to pay one's respects to, how to . . . greet . . . beyond its latinity, and in more than one language, the fragile difference between the *rational* and the *reasonable*."²² Let us transpose this task to the synonyms for *world*, the fragile difference between *world* and *universe* beyond Indo-European and repeat, from within that infinite effort, not otherwise: *mon korey uribar toreya bidhi deyna pakha*. False hope.

Rethinking Comparativism

IN THE TWO PREVIOUS ESSAYS I have given you a sample, by no means exhaustive, of my negotiations with my discipline in the matter of an aesthetic education in the era of globalization. It seemed that there was always an issue of controlling the other through knowledge production on our own terms, and an ignoring, therefore, of the double bind between Europe as objective and subjective ground, judge and defendant. In this essay I offer my rule of thumb for the times. Think of all languages as having the mechanism to prepare an infant for the world, therefore equivalent; learn comparativism not only from texts of disciplinary method but reach-out techniques in material studied. The essay is in the disciplinary mode, having been commissioned by the Comparative Literature issue of *New Literary History*.

What is it that one "compares" in Comparative Literature?

Goethe's *Weltliteratur* is usually invoked when talking about the beginnings of a comparative literature. The other story is Spitzer and Auerbach in Turkey. There is also the story of the rise of the discipline of Comparative Literature to intellectual prominence in the United States in the period following World War II, largely as a result of the migration to the United States of a group of noted European comparativists seeking asylum from totalitarianism. This group had a great influence in fostering the theoretical transformation of literary studies and in bringing about fundamental changes in national literature studies. But to think of comparative literature as comparative had something to do with the notion of *la littérature comparée* in France—where comparison implicitly referred

to the standards of the French eighteenth century. As I have pointed out, this attitude is reflected in the fundamental premises of Pascale Casanova's work today and in general disciplinary practice.¹ René Etiemble's *Comparaison n'est pas raison* attempted, in 1968, to combat that impulse in a manner that is still favorably comparable to much that goes on in the Euro-U.S. today.² But in terms of the questions we are asking, it is still too much within the internationalist side of Cold War logic—going no further than the front-line languages of India and East Asia, with a somewhat paternalistic approach. Whatever the outcome of that debate, and whatever the status of the classical traditions of Asia, Comparative Literature within the United States remained confined to European literary regionalism. After the Cold War, the division between a Eurocentric Comparative Literature and geopolitically oriented “Area Studies” seemed to have become less tenable than before. But comparison in favor of the European tradition has remained in place.

Seen another way, comparison assumes a level playing field and the field is never level, if only in terms of the interest implicit in the perspective. It is, in other words, never a question of compare and contrast, but rather a matter of judging and choosing. When the playing fields are not even continuous, the problem becomes immense. Most metropolitan countries acknowledge the problem simply because of the volume of migration in recent decades. There a certain degree of levelness (entry into the circuit of citizenship, desired when denied) is already established. I, on the other hand, write as I have always written, as soon as I began to publish in the 1970s, with a sense of the world rather than the demands of immigrants, in themselves also and of course a powerful disciplinary initiative. I would, however, like to distinguish my position, simply because it does not arise from “the forcing of cultures into greater proximity.” Charles Bernheimer wanted Comparative Literature to include “subaltern perspectives.”³ As I have regularly noted, I am just as regularly asked to help curate shows that will, give or take the culture, “bring the barrio to the museum.” This is to misunderstand even the way in which denial/desire/demand work in the establishment of the class cross-hatched space of migrant generations in metropolitan space. The degree of systemic change necessary for such transference to take place is precisely the issue.

It is absurd to expect a humanities discipline to bring about these changes. We are speaking of the establishment of citizenship structures within states where welfare is being eroded because national capital is supposed to be continuous with international capital in globalization. What a humanities discipline within the teaching machine can do here is alto-

gether indirect—non-absolutist quality control in admissions, sane curricular change, etc. The result of the steady influx of people from elsewhere into the metropolis and the attendant demands, as one section of this group becomes relatively class-mobile, are reflected in Comparative Literature in the last few decades in the following way: Each literary tradition, tied to a dominant language group, confronts the narratives produced by this Eurocentric history, more or less. Thus we have a confrontation of Comparative Literature and East Asian languages; Comparative Literature and South Asian languages; Comparative Literature and Central/North Asian languages are just stirring. Comparative Literature and Arabic/Persian/Turkish shades off into Orientalism as such (“a manner of regularized [or Orientalized] writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases *ostensibly* suited to the Orient [sometimes indistinguishable from immigrant nostalgia today]”) and, through Bulgarian, into Ottoman Studies and Balkan Studies.⁴ The modern period in each of these language groups relates in a different way to that main tradition, which remains “Europe” as affected by Eastern European theory filtered through France.⁵

We are not speaking of Cultural Studies here. Very generally speaking, I think it is safe to say that Cultural/Ethnic Studies, generally considered to be the political corrective to Eurocentric Comparative Literature, legitimizes the implicit comparison by reversal. This is of course too sweeping a generalization, and would have to be modified in any extended discussion.

Mainstream Comparative Literature divided over French theory. It has been touched also by the transformation of German theory through the fall of mere socialism. One consequence of these circumstances was the flight of intellectuals and the rise of comparativism. The much more resplendent social philosophical consequence of that was Hannah Arendt and the Frankfurt School.

This is the set we consider when we think of rethinking comparativism. When we, the first generation of U.S. Ph.D.'s in Comparative Literature were graduate students in the 1960s, we took a certain pride in asserting that the word “comparative” in our discipline was a misnomer; that the point about Comparative Literature was that it did not exactly “compare.” For the last few years, some of us have been trying to rethink comparativism, within the discipline, by pondering how exactly Comparative Literature does not compare, and how that not-comparing can shelter something affirmative.

I think the solution we found in the 1960s is not quite for these times. Those of us who belonged to the U.S. mainstream of comparative literature

found affinity among national literatures in place of what the verb “compare” offers: not only the etymological “pairing with” but also some hint of ranking. We found a strong ally in the theory of archetypes, psychoanalytic with C. G. Jung and R. D. Laing, literary-historical with Thomas O. Brown and Northrop Frye. Notions of the collective unconscious allowed us to bypass the problem of comparison and ranking. That line of work has found a strong champion today in my colleague and friend David Damrosch, whom I discussed in “The Stakes of a World Literature,” Chapter 22 in this book. I admire his work so greatly and so enjoy working with him that I should make clear that in this context, now, my thinking is different from his.

What was especially useful for us in those early days was the study of *topoi*, sets of imageme-narrateme-philosophemes that seemed to travel without either historical or psychic ballast across the history of literatures and cultures that make us: code geography, write our world. The Greek god Apollo and the Hindu goddess of learning, Saraswati, share the swan as a familiar. Ernst Robert Curtius was our guide here.⁶ Wellek has situated him in European patriotism; that great scholar was also an “Orientalist” in an expanded Saidian sense. In the 1990s, I wrote on “Echo” in this manner, finding in the non-agential voicing of the Greek mythological figure a way to think about woman’s fate, particularly in postcoloniality. That essay still seems to me persuasive enough to be included in this book. As graduate students we had been helped by the topological phenomenologies of Gaston Bachelard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Georges Poulet.⁷ I still recognize those trajectories in Lévinas (though not as a place-holder for comparison) and, of course, in the work of Jacques Derrida, whose brilliant topological slides do indeed teach us to think about relations without relations between diverse European texts.

Encompassing structures and archetypo-topical texture, not strictly polarized, helped us think affinity in place of mere comparison. We know today that those great networks of affiliations work by way of exclusions. Apollo and Saraswati quietly ignore those who have no right to learning. It is perhaps not too contentious to point out also that, in today’s divided world, to discover varieties of sameness is to give in too easily to the false promises of a level playing field. The United States is still the world’s policeman.⁸ I do not need to remind you of this.

I am standing with my mother in Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris. For a week we have fed our ears on academic French. Suddenly I bear an exchange in the harsh accents of upstate New York. I turn to my mother and say, in Bengali, roughly this: “Hard to listen to this stuff.” And my

mother: “Dear, a mother tongue.” My mother, caught up as she was in the heyday of resistance against the Raj, still extended imaginative charity to English.

I have told this story before and will say it again. Today I hold on to the fact that there is a language we learn first, mixed with the pre-phenomenal, which stamps the metapsychological circuits of “lingual memory.”⁹ The child invents a language, beginning by bestowing signification upon part-objects (Melanie Klein). The parents “learn” this language. Because they speak a named language, the child’s language gets inserted into the named language with a history before the child’s birth, which will continue after its death. As the child begins to navigate this language it is beginning to access the entire interior network of the language, all its possibility of articulations, for which the best metaphor that can be found is—especially in the age of computers—“memory.” By comparison, “cultural memory” is a crude concept of narrative re-memorization that attempts to privatize the historical record.

Comparative Literature imagines that each language may be activated in this special way and makes an effort to produce a simulacrum through the reflexivity of language as habit. Here we translate, not the content, but the very moves of languaging. We can provisionally call this peculiar form of translation before translation the “comparison” in Comparative Literature.

This is not to make an opposition between the natural spontaneity of the emergence of “my languaged place” and the artificial effortfulness of learning foreign languages. Rather, it is to emphasize the metapsychological and telecommunicative nature of the subject’s being-encountered by the languaging of place.¹⁰ If we entertain the spontaneous/artificial opposition, we will possibly value our own place over all and thus defeat the ethical comparativist impulse. Embracing another place as my creolized space may be a legitimation by reversal. We know now that the hybrid is not an issue here. If, on the other hand, we recall the helplessness before history—our own and of the languaged place—in our acquisition of our first dwelling in language, we just may sense the challenge of producing a simulacrum, always recalling that this language too, depending on the subject’s history, can inscribe lingual memory. In other words, a sense of equivalence among languages, rather than a comparison of historico-civilizational content. Etienne Balibar has suggested that equivalence blurs difference, whereas equality requires them. Precisely because civil war may be the allegoric name for an extreme form of untranslatability, it is that “blurring” that Comparative Literature needs.

I am not making claims of cultural equivalence, the unexamined dull anthropologism of cultural relativism. If you do not assume language to be isomorphic with cultural formation, you cannot move to such convictions. The apparent discrepancies in cultural power, measured on the grid of place to space, are meaningful in terms of the language's relative elaboration and importance. They become a matter of constative historical inquiry and performative resistance in the present, always waiting for what will have happened.¹¹ This is why we must remain mindful that the assumption of equivalence is upstream from all the historical language battles of postcoloniality and neocolonial power that are still being fought and must continue to be fought. I repeat that this is not nativism; any language or languages can perform this function. If in situations of migration the first language is lost, it is still a loss—not because of any kind of nationalist nostalgia, but because that originary, metapsychological constitution of ethical semiosis is de-activated. I think there is some kind of historical process that shifts those mechanisms into the newly chosen “naturalized” “first” language—which operates most successfully in the second generation.

Our rethinking of comparativism starts, then, with the admission that as language, languages are equivalent, and that deep language learning must implode into a simulacrum of lingual memory. We must wait for this implosion, which we sense after the fact, or, perhaps, others sense in us, and we thus enter into a relationship with the language that is rather different from the position of a comparer, a charter of influence, who supposedly occupies a place above the linguistic traditions to be compared. In other words, I have had enough of being told that imperialism gave us the novel.

Comparative Literature, then, begins to insist on the irreducibility of idiom, even as it insists on translation as commonly understood. When we rethink comparativism, we think of translation as an active rather than a prosthetic practice. I have often said that translation is the most intimate act of reading. Thus translation comes to inhabit the new politics of comparativism as reading itself, in the broadest possible sense.

In the name of comparativism as equivalence, we are prepared to undertake a serious and continuous undoing of nationalist or national language-based reading. We have not moved too far from the regionalist impulse of the initial vision of European Comparative Literature. We have simply announced a worldly future. It is our hope that, in this process, the performativity of comparativism will face the task of undoing historical injustice toward languages associated with peoples who were not successfully competitive within capitalism. With the added proviso that these lan-

guages attempt to establish an interconnection among themselves through our disciplinary and institutional help. This will take us a step outside the necessarily nation-centered and culture-centered frontiers of the United Nations.

The idea of a subaltern collectivity of languages and literatures outside of national-language restrictions is a difficult one. In order to take the diversified subaltern or less-taught languages out of enclavist or collectivist pedagogy and politics, to save Comparative Literature from unacknowledged and exclusivist comparison, structural and epistemological changes are required. I will quote some prose here that reflects a long, ongoing effort at institutional change. The implicit terms of resistance—this is against globalization—entrenches comparison beyond the discipline, indeed situates the discipline upon contemporary cognitive topography, in a negligible niche. I leave this caution here, proceed to the institutional passages, and close with two readings that can only look forward to the necessary yet impossible institutional guarantee of access to equivalence.

Even as we want to include Europe and necessarily the United States in any version of a globalized world, we also recognize that our efforts cannot succeed without a thorough-going program of the less-taught languages of that world. . . . This latter group could only be taught for a few semesters, with insufficient quality control, by insufficiently trained instructors, and with no possibility of students moving on to a major or a doctoral track. This lack of parity between established and less-taught languages goes against the very spirit of an enlightened globalization of the curriculum. This is matched by the lack of parity between teachers of language and teachers of literature in all US universities. . . . The labor is, of course, immense. It will involve faculty development seminars, postdoctoral fellows, extensive and new recruitment procedures, and the involvement of national professional associations. There must be a consortium, since the less commonly taught languages are many, the need is acute, no single university could hope to cover all bases and, given distant learning resources, the first stages of language learning could easily be shared.¹²

It is in view of the resistance to institutional change that I often speak of the humanities supplementing globalization by providing a world. The worldliness of our new Comparative Literature could be a key element in this continuing and persistent effort. For, given the differential between the “first” language and others, the equivalence that would formalize our new Comparative Literature will never be fully established. We must always work in the element of simulacra, putting in place a bond between the world's neglected languages. The literature of Okinawa will then take

its place with the wisdom songs of Ghana, and the historical fables of the Popol Vuh.

I want to make a methodological point before I conclude. We start from an assumption of linguistic equivalence which rests on language's capacity to inscribe. Always with one language as accidental standard, we escape national restrictions and create the simulacrum of equivalence through deep language learning across the spectrum of the subaltern languages of the world. The diversity and singularity of idiom remain a constant reminder of the singularity of languages. The absence of material equivalence provokes historical study. Within this procedural frame, how do we read now as comparativists?

Over the last few years, teaching the introductory course in Comparative Literature and Society to graduate and undergraduate alike, I have drawn a conclusion: in disciplinary method we remain astute. Attention to idiom, demonstration through textual analysis, acquisition of expertise in plotting the play of logic in rhetoric and vice versa. Insofar as our object of investigation is concerned, however, we acknowledge as comparativist any attempt that the text makes to go outside of its space-time enclosure, the history and geography by which the text is determined. Thus disciplinary convention expands toward what would otherwise escape it, and the field expands greatly, in many ways.

I now test my notion of textual comparativism with a look at Medoruma Shun's short story, translated "Hope."¹³

"Hope" has been called "the first post-colonial work of Okinawan literature."¹⁴ Like all *postcoloniality*, it looks forward to an undecidable future. Its very title, "Hope," out of joint with the narrative content, gives us a sense of this. How can it help us in the task of rethinking Comparative Literature in view of such an undecidable future?

By my disciplinary responsibility I would have to undertake the difficult journey of entering Japanese idiom and its relationship to the idiom of Okinawa. I would have to plot the relationships as I would, with appropriate differences, in Ireland, or Hong Kong. I am ill-prepared for this. What I can attempt now is the lesson of reading—locating an impulse toward comparativism in this new sense in the story itself.

The story is about a sacrifice and a suicide. Upon a scene of political conflict, such a double gesture often reflects a comparativism of last resort: a plea to the political other to recognize equivalence, to respond, and, finally, to end oppression. I have been long attracted to this species of comparativism, attempting to go outside of the space-time enclosure, when that enclosure means oppression, colonial or gendered or

both, undoing history and geography by inscribing the body with death.

I place the story of "Hope" in that genre, with "Can the Subaltern Speak?," with suicide bombing in Palestine, with Viken Berberian's *The Bicyclist*, with Santosh Sivan's *The Terrorist*, a film dealing with anti-colonial resistance and gender in Sri Lanka (see "Terror," Chapter 18).

One of the characteristics of this species of comparativism in extremis is the double bind between ethics and politics. This too is a theme that attracts me greatly.

(Comparativism in extremis is not a disciplinary choice of method. It can be located in our objects of investigation if it is represented. Comparativism in extremis is a political gesture when response [perhaps based on that lesson of equivalence in a context broader than our discipline] is denied. I have given above a few examples of such representation, including "Hope." *Bamako*, a film I will discuss at the end of this essay, is a teaching text, not a representation of comparativism in extremis. The film hopes that its lesson—the difference between resistance and the people—will be learned. Other examples of the representation of comparison in extremis—merely indexed—is a line in Rabindranath Tagore that I have discussed in Chapter 15. Speaking of the people to whom human rights were denied millennially in India, he writes: "*mrityumajhe hobe tobe chitabhashshe shobar shoman*"—"you [addressing his "unfortunate country"] will then be equal to all of them in the ashes of death," thus predicting the death of a nation. The only thing that will make me equal to you, because you deny response, is a shared death. This is also the theme of Ernesto Cardenal's poem "Prayer for Marilyn Monroe" [1965], made into a film by the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográfica, where the items of comparison are Marilyn Monroe, with her desperate life on the one hand and the millions of dead children in Latin America on the other, standing in as victims of the U.S. system, a place of no response. Cardenal is a priest, a liberation theologian—for him in death the two sides were equal in God's eyes, comparison as equivalence in extremis. Perhaps it may be said that our lesson of learning equivalence, practicing equivalence, indexing a small epistemic change or shift, may come to facilitate a world where comparison in extremis will no longer be required.)

A double bind, then. Between ethics (I must not kill) and politics (I can have a "response" from my non-respondent[s] only in a shared death).

To some the double bind, laboriously repeated throughout this book, may seem a dangerous idea. And yet, to deny its pervasiveness leads to failed revolutions. Paradoxically, to acknowledge its pervasiveness does not lead to unqualified success. This is its danger. I put you in mind of the detailed discussion of the double bind in the Introduction, and remind you that this paradox by no means exhausts the power and danger of the double bind. The one thing that we can propose is that the fiction and reality of comparativism in extremis often makes visible the double bind between ethics and politics.¹⁵

The fiction suggests formulaically that the political situation requires the violence of sacrifice: "*What Okinawa needs now is not demonstrations by thousands of people or rallies by tens of thousands, but the death of one American child.*"¹⁶ Yet the ethical unacceptability of violence requires the destruction of the political subject or actor. The pull of the ethical is so strong that the political act cannot be described as willed: "Just as fluids in the bodies of a small creature that is frightened suddenly changes into poison, [so] this deed of mine is natural and what had to happen [*hitsuzen*] for this island, I thought." And the pull of the political is so strong that the act representing the ethical is also a sacrifice and a destruction. The impossibility of containing the ethical subject in its worldly envelope is indicated in the text by the management of time:

At the moment that I *reclosed* the trunk, the sun *broke* through the cloud veil that *covered* the sky. I *am* sweating, and I *break out* in goose bumps. I *crossed* the forest on foot . . . and *returned* home. . . . The air conditioning *doesn't* work . . . I *lower* the windows but I *pour* with sweat. I *went* up to Naha city. . . . I *pour* a bottle of gasoline on my jacket and pants. . . . A group of junior high schoolchildren *came* running.¹⁷

The sweating and sacrificing body breaks through into the present tense as the narrative progresses in the past tense. The body reenters the narrated past as an object before language in the last sentence.

On the side of the dominant, there is the longing for a release from the double bind between nationalism (the political) and responsibility (the ethical). Thus Oe Kenzaburo repeats a phrase in 1969: "Is it possible to change to a Japanese who is not a Japanese?"¹⁸

The dominant can also refuse this longing and simply deny the double bind. Here is a comment from the staff of the Japan Policy Research Institute: "Americans are likely to be shocked by Medoruma's subject matter and tone." It is a well-meaning comment, for the staff then proceed to list U.S. marine criminal activity against Ryukyans, especially females. Yet

to separate nationalism and responsibility is precisely a denial of the double bind that can reduce resistance to the politically correct.

One of the incidental but altogether astute moments in "Hope" is where the narrator recognizes that every inhabitant of the island is not infected by what I am calling comparativism in extremis—the necessity to call for a response from the colonizer. The first gesture from an islander is the innocent one of joy at seeing a known person on TV! And the last gesture is the equally innocent frivolity of the children kicking the agent reduced to object. Between these two gestures of innocence lies the story, apparently useless. Commemorated in fiction, it becomes useful if we learn how to read as we mark time toward a comparativism of equivalence.

Without this, we cannot pick up the message if an artist points at the distance between protest and the people. Abderrahmane Sissako's film *Bamako* (2006), for example, is regularly read like a documentary of protest by most policy-oriented folks.

The film stages a trial, in the compound of a traditional African compound, by African judges and lawyers, with the participation of two white lawyers on either side, of the World Bank, for its crimes in Africa. The trial is contained within fragments of local action and a slim subplot about the death of a charismatic singer's husband.

The new comparativism can read this film as a filmic discourse on epistemic discontinuity in the welding of place. We notice how much of the staging is in terms of a relief map of languages, colonial but also local. The trial is framed by a community where only the ones who have graduated into the discursive practice of the good whites are able to "speak the truth." The director took care to point this out by making the subplot with a singer very attractive, by closing the film with her, focusing on her husband's death and making clear that it has little to do with the main argument. The high point of eloquence in the film, and deliberately, if you notice the framing, is the good white guy (apparently the director just gave them the parts and said, "Now speak")—and makes us think precisely about the problem. There are also the moments of grassroots choice when access to the "trial" of the World Bank is turned off by the young men of the village, the real agents of collaboration with the destruction of the country. The bridge agents are a woman who is accused of not fitting the evidentiary structure and, on another level altogether, the traditional healer who utters (apparently in a language not necessarily understood by the "native speakers"). The complexity of the framing is evident also in the presence of the film within the film, an exaggerated eye-catching African Western.

The entire film can be a figuration of why resistance against the transnational agencies misfires. But it is inconvenient and counter-intuitive to understand this.

A few images now merely to suggest how the film might figure the separation, indeed the discontinuity, between resistance and the people. It is not without significance, surely, that the World Social Forum had had a meeting in Bamako just before the film's release. I will repeat my earlier points to relate them to the images.

We are looking at a symbolic trial of the World Bank, staged in an African compound in Bamako. Sissako places two persons outside the frame: the charismatic female singer who would travel easily into the musical circle of global protest, and the traditional healer (see Figures 27 and 28). The name of the film appears on the screen after those two placings outside of the work.

Figure 29 shows the woman singing simply to show her forceful presence in the film. Indeed this bit is used to promote the film—although it is not part of the trial, where the participating Africans have achieved sufficient continuity with the European Enlightenment to be able to criticize its travesty:

Now to images where, in the film, Sissako distinguishes carefully between the difference in the response.

First, the good white guy testifying against the World Bank (Figure 30). He speaks in metaphors and the audience is shown responding collectively.

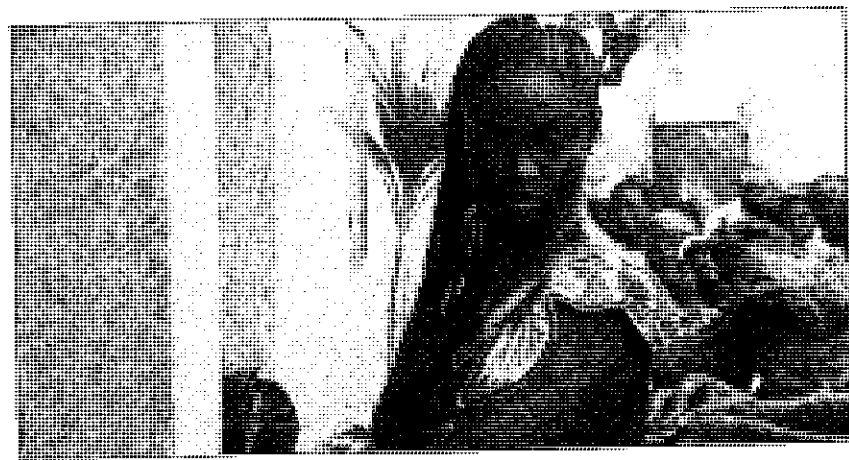


Figure 27: Singer interrupts film to have bustier laced.

Next, the black woman testifying (Figure 31). She is less eloquent and speaks more statistics. The response is more singular, less public.

Then the traditional healer, who finally intervenes, out of place (Figure 32). This is an undecidable moment, the moment of a double bind. For, if Mamadou Diouf is right, the Africans here do not necessarily understand what he sings. It may indeed be a procedural complaint on his own behalf. The response is mysterious, a pattern of close-ups of individual faces. We contemplate the distinction between singularity—repeatable difference—and the individual subject.



Figure 28: Healer leaves trial.



Figure 29: Singer's dynamism.

Contrast the much more innocent and open response to the African Western film within a film (Figure 33). This too is discontinuity from the trial. The African Western, with Danny Glover starring, is a generic opposite from *Bamako*, the film in which it is embedded. That is already a representational discontinuity. Further, the kind of innocent joy in such bloody mayhem that is portrayed in the mother and daughter is remote indeed from a critique of Western benevolence, from position in society within that enclosure, as represented by the "educated" Africans participating in the trial.



Figure 30: Good white guy.



Figure 31: Black woman testifying.

Without over-parsing, it remains noticeable that there are no white women in the film, no global feminist solidarity as is evident at the World Social Forum. Gender is the alibi for the entire spectrum of good and bad globalizing intervention. Has a criticism been represented here on the workings of the screen? For, as I have mentioned, Sissako takes care to present a taxonomy of black women, roughly in terms of distance from the European Enlightenment, if you like. And the implicit possibility of a male solidarity is shown across the color-class line, across the line where the black African has achieved rational epistemic continuity with the



Figure 32: Healer singing.



Figure 33: Innocent response to African Western.

white European. When Maître Rapaport—incidentally an actual person—interrupts on the side of the prosecution, his white colleague says to him, not waiting for procedure: “Shut up,” with a gesture behind his rump (Figure 34).

When M. Rapaport addresses the court, the men active in the village world of unofficial micro-governance (please contrast this to world-governance) disconnect the loudspeaker, also without waiting for procedure (Figure 35).



Figure 34: “Shut up.”



Figure 35: Africans disconnect loudspeaker.

Sissako and I have slipped in the question of gender, bigger than capital, since both sides are caught in reproductive heteronormativity and use gender as an instrument, an alibi—“the surrogate proletariat”; a question that the organized left intellectual, out of touch, expects only women and queers to ask, which is why a feisty philosopher like Agnes Heller, deeply sympathetic to women, says she is “against ‘feminism.’”

Thus we track comparativism in our objects of investigation, even as we reproduce epistemological conditions of first-language learning in foreign-language learning: an aesthetic education. History and politics come in here, details imagined robustly rather than shored up for the will to power and control through knowledge. Utopia in the classroom.

Working a century ago, Frantz Boas clearly indicated the need for deciding if the cultures of “primitive” places had independent origins or were influenced by transmission. To compare seemed to be the only solution. The time for that initial anthropologic comparativism is long over for us. Undoubtedly we should not rule out the contrast between historically independent origin and a comparativist study of dissemination from our discipline. In order to be able to do this as part of the discipline, however, we have to take a step back and perform the epistemological difference, looking forward to an epistemic difference “to come”: the lesson of thinking the equivalence of language, potentially, in a diversified metapsychological theater.