Start Trek & Endgame

Millennial Politics
Narratives Images

Edited by David Buchbinder
Start Trek and Endgame

Millennial Politics
Narratives
Images

A selection of papers from the Australian and South Pacific Association for Comparative Literature Studies Conference
Fremantle, Western Australia
11-13 December 1997

Editor: David Buchbinder

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Foreword

In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida cites an extract from a letter by Roger Laporte, by way of an epigraph to the section titled “The Hinge [La Brisure]”:

> You have, I suppose, dreamt of finding a single word for designating difference and articulation. I have perhaps located it by chance in Robert’s Dictionary if I play on the word, or rather indicate its double meaning. This word is brisure [joint, break] “—broken, cracked part. Cf. breach, crack, fracture, fault, split, fragment; [brèche, cassure, fracture, faille, fente, fragment.]—Hinged articulation of two parts of wood- or metal-work. The hinge, the brisure [folding-joint] of a shutter. Cf. joint.” (65)

*Brisure* is an accurate descriptor of the culture’s response to the imminence of the millennium, for such an advent may suggest, on the one hand, a radical break with the past, but also, on the other, a continuity with it—or perhaps a continuity *in spite* of the new millennial moment and its implied fracture from the preceding millennial period.

“Start Trek and Endgame: Millennial Politics/Narratives/ Images,” the title of the conference of the Australian and South Pacific Association for Comparative Literature Studies held at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle, Western Australia, in December 1997, attempts to capture that paradox, that self-contradiction in the notion of the millennium. “Start Trek,” of course, mimics and parodies the title of a popular television and film series whose narratives are set in an indeterminate future nonetheless marked by the passage of time (the time-marker “Captain’s log, Stardate . . .” begins each episode of the earlier *Star Trek* television series, setting the pattern for the later series and the movies); yet those future visions are already in the past by the time the viewer sees them. The “hinge” of an imagined futurity is thus both broken with and yet linked to a known pastness.

Likewise, “Endgame” proposes the conclusion of a series of moves—specifically, of chess, but metaphorically applicable to any number of other situations, as Samuel Beckett’s play of that name intimates. However, the end of one game is also potentially the beginning of a new one: the endgame is thus still another form of *brisure*.

The title and therefore also the theme of the conference, then, invited participants to consider ways in which the “hinge” of the eve of the new
millennium allows us simultaneously to look forward and backward. That Janus-like perspective permits articulation in two senses. The first of these is verbal: to express something; and here “articulation” signifies simply that the papers read at this conference expressed their authors’ point of view regarding or response to the idea of the millennium.

The other sense picks up the second meaning of brisure in Laporte’s letter, namely, “joint.” The jointing together of items may also be described as an articulation; and here the papers in the conference joint the idea of the millennium with a wide range of other concepts and issues. Such articulations include, for instance, in Henry Reynolds’s keynote address, the importance of history in understanding the nation, especially with regard to Australia’s indigenous peoples and the indignities and hurts they have suffered since colonisation; in Paul Arthur’s “Colonising the Future,” Australian-inflected futuristic visions from the past; in James Donald’s “Can Cultural Studies Survive the Millennium?” an investigation of the future of the field of cultural studies in redefinitions of the functions and purposes of the university; in Chika Anyanwu’s “The Body in a Space and the Space of a Body,” non-Western and non-capitalist perceptions of time; in Kateryna Longley’s “Oneself as Other,” the cession of traditional macro-narratives of history to micro-narratives of individual life-stories; in Walter Veit’s “The Ancient and the Modern,” an exploration of the idea of change itself as an topos with a long antecedence; in Margaret Macintyre’s “Celtic Revivals,” the replication and reinforcement, on the eve of the millennium, of conventional myths and workings of Irish history in the film Michael Collins; and in Jane Southwell’s “Playing with Fire,” Angela Carter’s use of de Sade in an effort to expand the conspectus of dominant feminist theory.

Some of the papers given at the conference could not be reproduced because of their strong reliance on visual materials, while others had been promised elsewhere for publication. However, the contents of this volume, selective though they may be, represent the very rich array of papers and topics presented, and indicate clearly the wealth of thought and scholarship generated by both the idea and the proximity of the coming millennium.

An international meeting of this sort requires the skills, time and energy of a large number of people working behind the scenes, both long before the conference actually takes place and while it happens. I would like to
thank the organising committee: Barbara Milech, Ann McGuire and Joan Newman, from Curtin University of Technology; Andrew Taylor, from Edith Cowan University; Kateryna Longley, from Murdoch University; and Terri-ann White, from the University of Western Australia: all of these people gave unstintingly of their time and their ideas.

Additionally, I want to thank Paula McNaughton, who helped me in the early stages of organising the conference, and Linda Browning, of the Black Swan Press, who stepped in part-way through that process and who took charge of the day-to-day details with aplomb, efficiency and unfailing good humour. She has continued to work with me in seeing the papers through to publication.

Ian Reid proposed the idea of holding the conference in Western Australia, and, as the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Division of Humanities at Curtin, generously made funds available to the organising committee to get the process underway. Tony Nicholls, the then Head of the School of Communication and Cultural Studies at Curtin, offered its technical resources, and its facilities for secretarial and other administrative work. Curtin’s Centre for Aboriginal Studies also contributed financially to the conference, and I thank Pat Dudgeon, then Head of the Centre, for her co-operation and her friendship.

Especial thanks are due to Dean Collard, who gave a traditional Aboriginal greeting to the participants at the conference and made us welcome in his ancestral lands.

David Buchbinder
Conference Convenor
School of Communication and Cultural Studies
Curtin University of Technology

Bibliography

Keynote Address

Henry Reynolds

For history the times are both good and bad. In the universities, departments age and shrink and are able to offer fewer course choices to diminishing intakes of students intent on pursuing work-related courses. At the Australian History Teachers’ Association National Conference in Brisbane in 1996 participants lamented their increasingly marginal status in the minds of Education Department bureaucrats and curriculum planners.

Meanwhile, professional historians feel under threat from critics who question the intellectual base of the whole enterprise. Clio’s honour is at stake. Prominent practitioners have recently sprung to her defence, protesting her veracity. The veteran British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, answered the call in the introduction to his recently published book On History, depicting a scene where

Theoreticians of all kinds circle round the peaceful herds of historians as they graze on the rich pasture of their primary sources or chew the cud of each other’s publications. Sometimes even the less combative feel compelled to face their attackers.

(vii)

The central concern of historians is that post-modernism threatens to undermine the citadel itself. In his book In Defence of History, Richard Evans observes that the question is now not so much “What is history?” as “Is it possible to do history at all?” Historians at the end of the twentieth century, he believes, are “haunted by a sense of gloom” (3). Doubts have been cast on core beliefs about the ability to gain objective knowledge about the past and about the nature of truth itself.

Both Evans and Hobsbawm strike back at the encircling critics. Evans concludes his book with the promise to look humbly at the past and say that, despite the assertions of history’s enemies, it really happened and that as long as the practitioners are scrupulous, careful and self-critical, they can “find out how it happened” and reach some “tenable though
always less than final conclusions about what it meant” (253). Hobsbawm pursues the same line of argument, albeit more assertively:

I strongly defend the view that what historians investigate is real. The point from which historians must start, however far from it they may end, is the fundamental and, for them, absolutely central distinction between establishable fact and fiction, between historical statements based on evidence and subject to evidence and those which are not [. . .] In short, I believe that without the distinction between what is and what is not there can be no history. (viii)

But, despite epistemological doubts and shrinking student demand, history stands tall in popular interest and estimation. Was there ever a time before in Australia when history was so central to the political debate; when Clio was consulted so readily? Individuals, families and communities are researching their history. Old buildings, old artefacts, old locations are restored, renewed and re-discovered. Mainstream Australia seeks to re-affirm its roots in the continent. The past is consulted for explanations about present dilemmas and future prospects. Like the community, politicians turn to history for justification and inspiration.

Paul Keating's "big picture" was as much about the past as the present. Speech-writer/historian Don Watson saw to that. The two men sought to persuade the electorate that to navigate our way into an uncertain future, we had to orientate ourselves correctly to the past. For his part, John Howard appeared to be obsessed with history in the early part of his Prime Ministership. He declared that he wanted the community to feel relaxed and comfortable about the past. He refused to apologise to the stolen generation and denounced what has come to be called the "black arm-band" version of history. In his Future Directions document of 1988, he had declared that people had been taught to be ashamed of their past:

Even people's confidence in their nation's past came under attack as the professional purveyors of guilt attacked Australia's heritage and people were told they should apologise for pride in their culture, traditions, institutions and history. (7)

Eight years later the passion had not cooled. The attempt to rewrite Australian history was "one of the more insidious developments" over the past decade (Howard, Sir Thomas Playford Lecture, 1).

The political leader's engagement with history is not surprising. It has been deeply implicated in many of the most controversial issues which have emerged during the 1990s. The High Court's Mabo judgement of 1992 was about both law and history. The six judges who supported the majority opinion that the Meriam people of the Eastern Torres Strait had native title to their islands defined and supported their arguments by reference to copious and diverse legal judgements. Their main business was jurisprudence. But the passion which drove the judgement came
from a deep sense of the need to remedy historical injustice, with Justices Deane and Gaudron referring to a legacy of unutterable shame.

If anything, history was even more important in the Wik case, which turned on the question of how to assess the nature of pastoral leases. The Commonwealth and the State governments argued that they had to be considered in terms of common-law doctrine relating to leases. The Wik people asserted that pastoral leases had to be considered historically as a unique product of Australian colonial development, created specifically to allow for the mutual use of land by pastoralists and traditional owners. It was an argument which four of the seven judges found persuasive.

History was even more directly involved in the Human Rights Commission’s report Bringing Them Home, which followed the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families. The Report is based on the testimony of 535 people, who gave evidence both publicly and in camera. One theme which runs through much of the testimony is the insistence that governments both apologise and explain why the policy had been implemented in the first place. One anonymous witness argues:

The Government has to explain why it happened. What was the intention? I have to know why I was taken. I have to know why I was given the life I was given and why I am scarred today. Why was my Mum meant to suffer? Why was I made to suffer with no aboriginality and no identity, no culture? (277)

The collection of testimony was not just a method to compile a history from below, but was rather an expression of an overwhelming desire for recognition and a need to speak and hear the truth. The Report explains the dynamics of the situation:

For victims of gross human rights violations, establishing the truth about the past is a critically important measure of reparation. For many victims and their families, an accurate and truthful description of past policies and practices and of their consequences is the first requirement of justice and the first step towards healing wounds. (284)

Insistence on the truth has echoed through indigenous politics for the last decade. The demand is that white Australia acknowledge the past. The popular slogan “White Australia Has a Black Past” sums it up well. Aborigines want European Australians to accept and to admit that their territories were invaded, their ancestors shot and brutalised, and their land expropriated without negotiation or purchase. Over and over again indigenous leaders have warned that without truth there can be no reconciliation. At the Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne in May 1997, the Chairman of the Reconciliation Council, Patrick Dodson, looked forward to the prospect of a nation at peace with itself because it has the courage to “own the truth of its past, to heal the wounds of its past, and therefore free itself from the chains of the past.” He sought
from the government and people an apology so that Australia could become a nation, "one part of which apologises for the wrongs of the past" and the other a part which "accepts that apology and forgives" (*Proceedings 8*).

This emphasis on telling the truth, confession, forgiveness, apology and reparation can be seen in many parts of the world during the 1980s and especially during the 1990s. It is as if the approach of the millennium has called forth a ubiquitous desire for a clearing of the decks, for atonement and new beginnings. In the ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe, in the new fragile democracies of Latin America and in post-apartheid South Africa, whole communities have been drawn into the process of reconciliation.

The instrument used for this end is what has been generally called the Truth Commission. It has taken a variety of forms. The United Nations has set up Commissions to deal with Bosnia, Rwanda, El Salvador, Guatemala and Somalia. There have been government bodies in South Africa, Argentina and Chile, and unofficial ones in Brazil and Uruguay. Writing of these commissions in the *Duke Journal of International and Comparative Law*, the American scholar Michael Scharf argues that they serve four primary purposes: (1) to establish an historic record; (2) to obtain justice for the victims; (3) to facilitate national reconciliation; and (4) to deter further violations and abuses. He believes that creating a credible account of human rights crimes prevents history from being lost or rewritten, and allows a society to learn from its past in order to prevent a repetition of such violence in the future. Justice, he argues, is promoted by imposing moral condemnation and laying the groundwork for other sanctions. National reconciliation and individual rehabilitation are facilitated by acknowledging the suffering of victims and their families, helping to resolve uncertain cases, and allowing victims to tell their story, thus serving a therapeutic purpose for an entire country, and imparting to the citizenry a sense of dignity and empowerment that could help them move beyond the power of the past (379).

A central concern of the societies in question was to investigate and interrogate the past in order to prevent a return to the tyrannies, whether practised by communist party officials, death squads or police and para-military forces of right-wing dictatorships. The main weapon available to fledgling democracies was thought to be the truth. The El Salvador Commission on Truth was established in order that the "complete truth be made known" (Scharf 385). The Argentine Commission into the Disappeared Persons was instructed to "ascertain the truth of what had happened" under the generals (Coonan 521). In the then Czechoslovakia, the authors of Charter 77 declared:

> We call only for the truth. The truth about the past and the truth about the present are indivisible. Without accepting the truth about what happened it is impossible to address correctly what is happening now; without the truth about what is
happening now it is impossible to substantially improve the existing state of affairs. (qtd. in Kaye 16)

Victims of torture and oppression, like members of Australia’s stolen generation, are often insistent that what they want above all is an investigation which establishes the truth about what happened to them both in order to come to terms with their suffering and to ensure that it will never be forgotten. A Chilean commentator who followed the proceedings of the local Truth Commission noted that

If anything the desire for truth is often more urgently felt by the victims of torture than the desire for justice. People don’t necessarily insist that former torturers go to jail—but they do want to see the truth established. (Coonan 545)

The exposure of the truth has been seen as necessary for both individual victims and for societies endeavouring to recover from periods of oppression and tyranny. The Deputy Chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Alex Boraine, observed that for the process of healing it was essential that the truth about gross human rights violations came out into the open. “To be able to forgive,” he wrote, “one needs to know whom one is forgiving and why.” Without the truth it was impossible to do that (Boraine vii).

On reflection it is easy to see why the assorted investigative bodies have been given the generic name of truth commissions. Voices from many different parts of the world—South Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and Australia—join in chorus to demand that their societies discover and proclaim the truth, to record the facts about brutality and repression. The exercise is seen as playing a critical role in the process of democratisation, reform, reconciliation and reparation.

Historians are called upon to play this forensic role of uncovering and proclaiming the truth. Society expects much of them at the very time that they are consumed by epistemological doubt and are not sure if they can find out what actually happened in the past. The irony was not lost on the American legal scholar Mark Osiel, who observed in his recent book Mass Atrocity, Collective Memory and the Law, apropos of the work of the truth commissions:

Before there is any debate about who is morally or legally responsible for what, about which lessons must be learnt by whom to prevent the catastrophe’s recurrent, people want to know the facts. The banners they proclaim through the streets might just as well carry the motto of the nineteenth century German historian, Leopold von Ranke: to discover the past as it really was—a view today treated as the object of ridicule by many professional historians. (266)

In Argentina, El Salvador and the old Soviet Empire much of the population
Keynote Address

... rises up in support of the view that there is a bedrock of basic facts about who did what to how many, when, and in what fashion. These must be authoritatively established, to provide the foundation for any legitimate public discussion of these events. It is not enough that the facts be generally known; they must also be publicly acknowledged. (Osie 268)

The critical question which arises from the discussion to this point is whether the search for justice and reconciliation is dependent on a bedrock of basic fact and, by implication, on the ability of historians to discover what actually happened in the prisons, the torture chambers, the police cells, the government committees, the military barracks.

Norman Geras, professor of government at the University of Manchester, has argued strongly:

If there is no truth, there is no injustice [...] if truth is wholly relativised or internalised to particular discourses or language games [...] final vocabulary, framework of instrumental success, culturally specific set of beliefs or practices of justification, there is no injustice [...] The victims and protesters of any putative injustice are deprived of their last and often best weapon, that of telling what really happened. They can only tell their story, which is something else. Morally and politically, therefore, anything goes. (110, 125)

This paper began with the observation that it is both a good time and a bad time for history. In Australia the Prime Minister has accused history of undermining the community's pride in its past and of donning the black arm-band of mourning. History has a very high profile and has been central to many of the major debates in the community but it struggles for survival in both schools and universities.

As theoreticians circle, epistemological doubt creeps into the profession. Those who have taken the linguistic turn identify history with fiction and argue that narratives are made and not found in the documents. Traditional history appears old-fashioned, unreflective, unsophisticated. But events outside the academy re-affirm the moral authority and political potency of history. While it has always been used by the rich and the powerful, it is a weapon within the reach of the poor, the oppressed and the disregarded. Though still dressed in her dowdy late-Victorian clothes, Clio can move the world.
Bibliography


The Ancient and the Modern: The Topos of Change

Walter F. Veit

Plus ça change—
plus ça reste la même chose.

Summary
One of the most potent topoi, i.e., strategies of rhetorical argumentation, in public debate at the end of the second millennium is the topos of change. Like "the market," "change" has become in our time an unquestioned and unquestionable value in itself and is elevated to a ritual incantation when other arguments fail. This is all the more surprising as the notion of change has been an enduring part of and under scrutiny for the better part of the history of human thought in association with time and place.

The paper proposes to investigate a few important stages of the topos and suggest a general outline of its development from antiquity to modernity. It will become apparent that the understanding of change itself underwent radical changes in the course of intellectual history: from an understanding of change as diabolic to its acceptance as a defining element of human existence.

Finally, the investigation of the topos as phenomenon in literature and public discourse offers the opportunity of discussing the theory and merits of rhetoric and topos research in literary criticism.

Introduction
In August 1997, the Institute of General Rhetoric at Tübingen University organised a conference on Topos Research which demonstrated and highlighted, in my opinion, two important developments in this area: firstly, an acceptance by literary criticism of the integration of rhetorical topoi into a general theory of argumentation; and secondly, a reluctance similarly to accept the philosophical foundation of topoi and the consequences emerging for the theory of literature and literary criticism. It seems to me that the separation of the two developments is untenable. For, just as for rhetoric in general, the understanding, of topos in particular has arrived at an
affirmation of the systematic link between literature and philosophy on the level of epistemology as well as of ontology.

The affirmation of the link is owed to penetrating research into the history and system and function of rhetoric and topoi by many scholars in Germany and abroad—such as H. Blumenberg, Lothar Bornscheuer, E. Grassi, J. Kopperschmidt, H. Lausberg, G. K. Mainberger, J. Martin, M. Naas, H. F. Plett, A. O. Rorty, H. Schanze, G. Ueding—to name but a few to whose work I am indebted.¹

The Theory of Topos

With regard to the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, the contributions by Hans Blumenberg and Ernesto Grassi seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum of interpretations. In an early essay, Hans Blumenberg has emphasised the interconnection of traditional rhetoric and present-day philosophical anthropology which offers two radically different alternatives: humans are either rich or poor beings and “rhetoric has to deal with the consequences arising from the possession of truth or with the embarrassment due to the impossibility to achieve truth” (104). Within this dilemma, the position of rhetoric is directly related to its importance in anthropology: in contrast to metaphysics which first places the human being into a higher level totum and then forgets, rhetoric is focused on the singularity of the human being, particularly on language, not because “language is a specific characteristic of humanity but because in language its specific predicament comes to light” (108). The predicament lies in the fact that humans have fallen out of the order of nature and are forced to win back that order in their own way if they want to survive. Humans achieve this in language which makes communicative action possible. This predicament emerges also in science (Wissenschaft), especially in a science like philosophy which is motivated by doubt. For wherever humans are forced to act without evident, i.e., form and necessary knowledge, rhetoric gains its function. This situation is the reason that Blumenberg defines the principle of rhetoric as the “principle of insufficient reason.” It is the principle of unattainability of truth. But truth is the ideal which serves as the basis for the definition of humanity. Through rhetoric, humans try therefore to attain “what they are not.”

Ernesto Grassi, on the other hand, argues for a rhetoric as inventive speech, as poetry, as the other of analytic rationalism, of science. He comes from an ontological position influenced by Martin Heidegger, the Italian humanists and Giambattista Vico, all of whose thought is in critical contrast to Platonic onto-theological metaphysics. His epistemological argument is based on Aristotelian logic and runs as follows: Scientific knowledge is obtained by proving something with necessity, an achievement possible only if the proof itself is based on first principles, commonly known as axiomata or archai. The question is, how are these first principles established? Since they are first principles, they cannot be the object of any further proof. We

¹ See the most recent bibliographies in Schanze and Kopperschmidt; Kopperschmidt (2 vols); Naas; Rorty.
account for this logical conclusion by saying that these axioms are "self-evident." They can only be shown to our eyes. Thus the apodictic analytic demonstration is based on a foundation which is of a different order of knowledge.

In the metaphysics of Plato, St. Thomas or Immanuel Kant, these principles are the Ideas, God or the Transcendental Ideas of Pure Reason, transcendent, other-worldly, all of them. They are established by an act of faith, when faith was still knowledge of a higher order. In a post-Enlightenment era, but already with a number of Italian humanist philosophers, they are replaced mainly by language: not by analytic reasoning but by poetic speech which, to all intents and purposes is—at least to the middle of the eighteenth century—dominated by rhetoric. According to Grassi, rhetorical speech is not apodictic but semantic, that is, signifying, indicating, announcing; and archaic, because it presents the beginnings. It is metaphorical because it signifies not in abstract concepts but in concrete images which are, nevertheless, definitions. We need only to look at one of these definitions in order to recognize its archaic character: anthropos zoon logon echon—a human is a living being that possesses speech; homo animal rationale—a human is a breathing being that can count. We have no difficulty in accepting that both definitions are principles which have dominated Western thought at least since Plato. We are also aware that although the second is usually taken to be a translation of the Greek phrase into Latin, they are fundamentally different, indicating two different ways of thinking, perhaps two stages in the history of European thought. The same could be demonstrated with regard to the other important definition of the human species: anthropos zoon politicon—a human is a being that participates in the life of a city; homo animal sociale—a human is a breathing being that lives with others.

With Ernesto Grassi's philosophical deduction in mind, I would like to describe my own position in this debate directly from the position of rhetoric which Aristotle linked systematically to philosophy by describing it as the science of dialectical argumentation, i.e., argumentation which does not claim apodictic certainty but, rather, openness toward first principles:

Ultimately it [the dialectical argumentation of rhetoric] is also useful for the philosophical sciences. [...] It is also useful in the recognition of that which the first (arche) with regard to the principles (ta prota) in the sciences. It is impossible to find out anything about them on the basis of the principles of the sciences because the principles are the first of all; rather one has to get to the matter with the help of contingent arguments about the subject. This process belongs characteristically or most appropriately to dialectic speech. It is an art of finding, and therefore it dominates the path to the principles of the sciences (exetastikê gár ousa prós tás hapason ton méthodon archas échei, 101a37-b4).

Aristotle elaborates this function in his treatise on Topics. These topoi, translated as loci communes by the Roman rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian, our commonplaces, are not only the places where arguments can be found or heads of arguments under which arguments have been brought together. In Aristotle's treatise they are of a formal nature, e.g., the topos
of argumentation from a definition, from the contrary, from similarity, and so on. But soon other argumentative schemes were called topoi, such as argumentation from authority; and finally, following Quintilian and medieval practice, Ernst Robert Curtius has offered a catalogue of substantive topoi which goes far beyond the Aristotelian system. They can nevertheless be completely integrated as long as interpretation recognises and preserves their argumentative character. Of similar importance is his recognition of the essential historical character of topical argumentation. While the formal topoi seem to persist in general communication, substantive topoi are prone to decay and become clichés, while new topoi can arise any time. Their quality rests alone on their ability to open a view on principles which convince the audience that the deductions flowing from them will be true.

For the present purposes I do not have to go any further in my exposition of Aristotle's definition and function of topoi in dialectical speech in the context of rhetoric. I need only add that the theory of topoi and its practice lasted with little change from antiquity to Immanuel Kant, who gave it a new turn. However, the most important consequence emerged immediately in the context of literature: after all, everyday communication, poetic speech, literature—comprising all of its genres—is the most important area of dialectic argumentation. But the important questions of human life are not dealt with in propositional form; rather, they are presented in images—which concept I take to comprise the instruments of literary presentation from metaphors to lyrics, dramatic action and epic stories. Thus literature can be defined as aesthetic argumentation. In fact, we are forced to admit that in Aristotelian Rhetorics and Topics we have a fully fledged general theory of communication.

Topoi are, then, aesthetic arguments or clusters of arguments which have been presented in a historical situation as answer to important questions. Their historic character is important in the ongoing debate. Some of them have had an extremely long life, are perhaps convincing even today. Others have been invented to live only a short time. The origin and life of topoi is one of the most fascinating research projects because they let us see something of human intellectual life.

The Topos of Change

The Experience of Permanence and Change

Among those topoi that lasted from the beginning of European recorded history to the present, we find the topos of change taking an eminent place. In fact, we can say that change has turned out to be, then and now, one of the most important topics of debate about the human condition. At present we talk of necessary changes, modern transformations, flexibility, mobility, modernisation, and of "change at any price." Behind this cluster of synonyms, which are always juxtaposed to antonyms denoting stability, emerges the notion of revolution, denoting the overthrow and transformation of all that is given in human life. The concept comes to us from Latin where, in its verbal form, revolution denotes the rolling on of the years and centuries and, occasionally the movement of the stars. Revolution as a noun appears only in the sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries to describe the movement of the constellations during the year. Only in the eighteenth century does it acquire the meaning that is current today. It is this meaning, particularly the meaning given to it in Karl Marx’s theoretical model, which dominates our own experience and description of historic events. Early in the twentieth century, Leon Trotsky tried to stabilise the historic experience of a dialectic of stability and change in form of the old (the Ancien Régime) and the new (the New Man) in the paradox theory of a “permanent revolution.”

It seems to me that the Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” is the hidden content of our present obsession with change which has become today—but already much earlier—very problematic because the price of change has come under scrutiny by economists, social scientists, intellectuals and the general public. We are no longer certain that the promotion of change has led to a better life.

The social phenomena which have led to a critique of change in many areas may be identified as uncertainty of the future, uncertainty of peace, obscurity of political situations, insecurity of work and social support, public insecurity, corruption of values, intellectual chaos, chaos as basis for the theory of knowledge. The lack of certainty has become notorious in Habermas’s announcement of a “new obscurity.”

In an earlier paper I discussed the relationship of change to work, the other fundamental notion in European civilisation. I was able to show how the perception of work had changed radically during the course of European intellectual history: from the original negation of leisure (Latin otium, German Musse) as a consequence of human hybris and as punishment for sin, it changes to become an essential characteristic of mankind and the true principle of life.

But work belongs together with thought to the complex and essential elements of the dialectic of permanence and change. We might say that thinking and working are at the centre of the dialectic, for in the depth of thinking and working through which humans try to give permanence to their existence lies hidden the sting of impermanence.

Metabolé and Mutatio in Antiquity

It needs to be said right at the beginning that the concepts of Change and its synonyms are always juxtaposed to their antonyms denoting permanence, change to stability, mutation to immutability. The Greek metabolé and the Latin mutatio/mutabilitas mean alteration of something existing into something else, into an other. The authors of antiquity have always pointed that out using the relevant images:

Mutation: signifies an action by which something is put for something else (Thes. 1718, 12), or: signifying an action by which something is transferred into a different state (1718, 21), or even clearer by Gregor the Great in his Moralia in Iob (5.68): to be changed [...] is to go from one to the other and does not have any stability in itself (1722, 44).

Gregory the Great (540-604) introduces the decisive word into the debate: stabilitas, Gr. bèbaiôtes, permanence, solidity. While muto is contracted
from *moviti*, meaning “to move from this place,” the Gr. *metabállo* is an extension of *bállo*, “to shoot, to fall, to run”; the etymology of *stabilitas* refers to *stare, sto*, “to stand,” and that of *bebaiōtes* to *bāīno*, “to stand and walk on firm legs.” In Christian times, mutation can take on the meaning of transfiguration and metamorphosis.

**Primary Images**

At least four groups of images dominate European thought on permanence and change, with a preference on change which is extended to mutability of existence. I refer in particular to Homer’s *Odyssey* and Hesiod’s doctrine of the *Four Ages*, as well as to Heraclitus’s images of river and war, both of which received their most extensive presentation in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Much later the images of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and finally those in the New Testament are added.

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the images of the sea and of shipping signify the mutability of life. All our images of the ship of life navigating the sea of life have their origin in this work. In contrast to the insecurity of the sea, the firm land on which Odysseus finds rescue again and again—and which he leaves again and again—offers security and stability.

This imagery of the mutability of the individual life is extended in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* to a sequence of images of the mutability of the history of humanity: even the image of greatest stability, Hesiod’s *Golden Age*, is finally drawn into the vortex of change, falling from the Golden into the Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages, a progressive deterioration and a fall into time. It is the hybris of humans who do not want to remain within the stability of their own but long for the other—even to leave firm land and travel across the sea to new lands—which introduces change that in turn leads to a decline and ultimately the loss of “time without time,” as later mystics describe the Golden Age.

The pre-Socratic seventh-century Heraclitus (see Mansfield, I: 231-83) introduced in his teaching the two fundamental images of change which have been quoted again and again in literary history ever since:

> It is impossible to enter the same river a second time. The river disperses and brings together again [. . .] and comes up and leaves again. (Mansfield, I: 273, No. 96)

And

> Conflict is the father, the ruler of all, for he has made the one gods, the other human beings, the one slaves, the other free people. (I: 259, No. 50)

But we win access to his thinking in the next fragment:

> It is fitting that one knows that conflict is something general and that justice means also dissent, and that everything happens according to dissension and is also done that way. (No. 51)

It seems that Heraclitus has discovered beyond conflict the binarity of thought as it became apparent already in the binarity of change and permanence. The question is now whether or not we are justified in
regarding conflict as a derived mode of existence in which harmony and peace are the primary modes, the principles to which everything has to return. Hesiod’s images seem to suggest as much.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* are in the first place a poetic codification of the clash between the pre-Greek Pelasgian myths with those of the victorious Achaean-Dorian immigrants into the Peleponnese. We might conclude that these archaic myths preserve the conflict with the more litigious Greeks in a world view which lets everything emerge from chaos, gaining permanence through continuous formation and re-formation, and thereby maintaining its place in the whole. We might discover here expressed for the first time the idea of stability through change. This idea is elaborated in the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, in which the teaching of Pythagoras is expounded with the help precisely of the images of the ship of life on the high seas of life. They announce the resurrection of archaic myth, and with them the enunciation of the new doctrine of metempsychosis which transcends total changeability and can give permanence to impermanence:

> And as it carries me on high flood, I leave the full sails to the wind: there is nothing in the whole world which has permanence. All flows, all phenomena are formed by change. Even time slips away in constant motion just like the river. For the river cannot stand still, nor can the fugitive hour. And how every wave is chased by the next, pushed by the coming wave it pushes the one before, thus simultaneously flees and pursues also time yet is always new; for what has been before, now it is gone and it becomes what never has been before; and all motion is renewed. (XV: 177-85)

In Ovid’s exposition of the doctrine of Pythagoras, the ontological basis is precisely indicated:

> Nothing retains its external form, the one who changes all things, Nature, has the one emerge from the other. Believe me, nothing in this world perishes really, it is only changed, renews its face. To be born means to be something else than before, to begin, and to die means to end to be the same. May this or that be transported from here to there, the whole is completely permanent. (XV: 252-58)

However, we should not overlook that these metamorphoses are also a last refuge: Daphne is rescued from the lusty Apollo, Hyakinthos killed by Apollo’s discus, Actaeon torn to pieces by Artemis’ dogs for his transgression, and more. What else could it mean than that the time of peaceful metamorphosis has ended and the progressive time of antagonism, of the rights of the strongest, has begun?

Our interpretation has uncovered the state of contemporary thinking about human affairs preserved in these few poetic images, in their different forms and content, from antiquity to the present day. Although we are dealing with texts from the European tradition only, we need to realise that a similar problematic of permanence and change is also part of other cultures: we need remind ourselves only of comparable representations in Indian and Chinese literature.
Strategies of Stabilisation

We have already acknowledged Pythagoras's paradoxical solution of the contradiction of permanence and change, of eternity and time. There are, however, other competing efforts to understand and define the human condition. Among the pre-Socratic philosophers, among whom I have already mentioned Pythagoras and Heraclitus, Anaximander and Anaximenes deal again explicitly with the problem. A fragment of Anaximander's (610-546 BC) indicates clearly that his ontology begins with permanence. Change is a transgression which has to be expiated by return to permanence. The famous fragment reads:

From which [existing things] the existing things have their origin, thereto they will also return, according to the order, for they offer each other justice and punishment for the injustice in accordance with the order of time speaking about it in rather in metaphoric terms. It is clear that he, because of his observations of the transformation [metabolē] of elements into each other, could not welcome that one of them should be determined as fundamental, and that he posited something else in addition and outside of them. According to his opinion, the process of becoming is not determined by the transformation of the elements [alloiōuménou toû stoicheíou], but rather that the contradictions emerge from it through the movement of the eternal. (I: 73-4, No. 15)

It seems that the solution of the problem lies in the idea that the eternal itself exists in permanent, uniform movement and expels the impermanent and contradictory. Anaximander’s successor Anaximenes expresses a similar understanding. Simplicio and Theophrastus report that he assumed “movement to be eternal; for this reason movement is also the cause of change (metabolē)” (I: 93, Nr. 7).

It remains to us to ask whether this perception of a law in the process of change has opened up the possibility of an understanding of permanence. For the philosophers of classical antiquity, the regularity of celestial movements is the epiphany of the eternal law which is then identified with the gods. Hesiod played a decisive role, and many centuries later, Cicero returned to a discussion of this aspect again and again. It was Cicero who introduced new concepts/metaphors into the discussion: stabilitas and constantia, as opposed to mutatio and mutabilitas, later renovatio (De nat. deor. 118-20). Denoting first the laws ruling the movements of the stars, their immutabilitas—meaning “unalterable” and not “immovable”—they are turned into principles of ethics and are connected with the good as well as with good fortune and the beautiful. “Who can rely on the durability of the body or the stability of good fortune? But nobody can be completely happy albeit through the stability, solidity and permanence of the good” (TV, 40). In De officiis Cicero introduces stability and constancy as opposites to the passiones in love.

It becomes clear that as late as Cicero the concept of change (mutatio) and its presentation in his writing are closely linked to stability and constancy. Only rarely is it combined with fortune—but even in that context does not necessarily mean the “fickleness of fortune” to which humans are helplessly
subjected, but rather the regularity of change according to the “equilibrium of things.” Thus the contemporaries cannot but meet with equanimity the irresistible change which is taken to be an epiphany of the inscrutable divinities. In his writings Seneca bears sufficient witness for this attitude, particularly in his De tranquilitate animi (II: 102-71). In line with his Stoic philosophy he can finally offer the following advice:

We need to be flexible in order not to submit too much to our desires, and we should give in to the circumstances into which fate has brought us. We should, therefore, not fear a change neither in our desires nor in our situation in order that frivolity which is the most dangerous fault may befall us. (XIV: 1; II, 157)

Early Christianity

The new, revolutionary doctrine of salvation of Christianity brings its own teaching and that of the Old Testament into the context of classical Greek and Roman literature, and reshapes decisively the existing understanding of permanence and change. The most important examples for this development are the transformation of the concepts of metanoia and metamorphosis. The meaning of metanoia changes from “recognising afterwards” to “change in thinking” and “to become different in mind” which under the influence of the new concepts of repentance and atonement finally denotes a “turning,” or conversion. In the case of metamorphosis the classical meaning of “trans-formation” turns into the Christian “transmutation” and “transfiguration.” These developments in meaning indicate radical changes in the intellectual world, the consequences of which are becoming apparent perhaps only today.

The Judeo-Christian topoi of permanence and change develop further old concepts in a new direction which nevertheless leads to an amalgamation with Greco-Roman traditions. We observe a continual transformation from the “old man” to a “new man,” from evil to good, from earthly to heavenly, from temporal to eternal, from human to divine, from immanence to transcendence, all of which indicate a progress toward the permanent. Both aspects remain important. Indeed, we need to ask whether or not this continual change in meaning toward an ontological predominance of permanence indicates not so much a return to the primordial—as it did in Hesiod—but an ascent to ultimate salvation and to a transcendence in which all mundane rationality comes to an end.

This process of transformation with regard to change and permanence is not yet recognisable in Hosea or Amos; it becomes apparent in Isaiah and Jeremiah in the meaning of a “turning away from evil” and “turning toward Jahwe,” of “reorientation,” and particularly with the prophet Ezekiel (who flourished in the first half of the sixth century B.C. and was contemporary with the Greek philosophers before Socrates), who announces a change to “a new heart and a new spirit” (Ez. 18: 31).

On the basis of Old Testament piety, the meaning of metanoéo (“perceive afterwards”) changes very gradually to a specific religious-ethical sense which distances itself from the profane understanding through a notion of a change which has durability (Behm and Würthwein 986).
The shift of the semantic field from “perception afterwards” to “radical transformation of the mind” takes place in the New Testament: we witness “a radical transformation of the relationship between God and human, and between human and God; ‘metanoéo’ and ‘metánoia’ are the forms in the New Testament in which the old notion of a religious-ethical conversion is newly shaped” (Behm and Würthwein 986). Conversion and change are now the fundamental demand, but it becomes also clear that such a conversion is not the achievement of the faithful but rather a gift of God (Mt. 18: 3); in fact, Paul understands it as a religious act in the sense that change is the result of divine action (2 Cor. 7, 9 ff.)

With regard to metamórfosis, we have already recognised its origin and meaning in Greco-Roman antiquity and how Ovid receives the Greek myths of metamorphosis. These represent the idea of a continual change, a permanent permutation, which in the context of the mysticism of late antiquity offers the intellectual possibility of a “solution of the body from the fetters of material nature and a transfiguration of the body”—as in the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, described in Matthew 17: 2. Already in Seneca metamorphosis has obtained the meaning “change of essential spirituality.” The transformation of Jesus, which resembles strongly the epiphany of the Greek godhead, directs our attention to the lasting by making visible at least to the chosen people the reality of God at the end of time which is not only anticipated but secured in the imagery. But we are again confronted with the paradox inherent in the change from the ephemeral into the everlasting in Paul’s theology, in which that metamorphosis is not the result of an “autoactivity of humanity to bring about the decisive change—it is from the side of Christ that the Christian is changed” (2 Cor. 3: 18; Rom. 12: 2). (Behm 766)

The Transition to Modernity

In late antiquity the classical and Christian traditions are gradually joined and handed on. We can observe the amalgamation in the epistemology of Boethius’ (480-524AD) in which man is, like all creation, exposed to change. This has definite consequences for the recognition of truth:

the things themselves are changeable and of an uncertain future; therefore all enunciations are expressed neither with a variable nor a definite truth. (Boethius, line 19)

On the other hand, the new apologetics and homiletics portray the old understanding of the uncertainty of change as surmountable and surmounted opposition to the new doctrine of salvation. St. Ambrose of Milan (340-397) and his disciple Augustine (354-430) instrumentalise Old Testament psalms and prophets for the mutability of human existence in order to argue e contrario for the immutability of the Divine:

Lord of hosts, lead us back to you and show us your face and we will be saved. For, wherever the human soul turns except toward you, everywhere pain adheres to it; even when it tries to grasp the most beautiful apart from you and itself. For even the most beautiful has its origin only from you. It rises and falls: in becoming, so to say, it begins to be, then it grows and reaches perfection; but if it is perfect, it ages and dies. Not everything ages but everything passes away.
Therefore, that which becomes and strives for being, runs back to non-being the quicker it grows to be. That is his destiny. That is the direction you have given it because it belongs to the things which do not exist all at the same time, but in a constant cycle of becoming and passing form the universe of which they are all part. (Conf. 4: 10)

In his Expositions on the Gospel of St. John he draws the dogmatic consequences which bring together the semantic processes of the topoi of permanence and change, and presents them using the imagery of the run of time from the past via the present to the future:

Everything—even if it is of the highest quality—does not truly exist if it is mutable. For the true cannot exist where there is also non-existence. [. . .] In all our actions and movements and altogether in the stirring of a creature, I find two times: past and future. I look for the present but nothing endures. What I have uttered is already gone. What I want to say, does not yet exist. What I have done, is now passed. What I want to do, is not yet. What I have lived through, is no longer; what I want to live through, does not exist as yet. Past and future I find in every movement of things. But in truth, which persists, I do not find past or future but only the present and precisely the present everlasting which does not apply to creatures. Behold the mutation of things: you will find a "was" and a "will be." Behold God, and you will find an "is," in which there can be no "was" or "will be." Therefore, in order that you might be, transcend time! (38, 10)

It is important to point out how in Augustine's exegesis everything is subjected to temporality and is therefore in need of salvation. Augustine, in his Exposition of the Psalms, particularly of Ps. 109, 20, and John Chrysostomos (347-407), in his Homilies,1 use the classical images of storm and of the rock in a raging river or sea. John Chrysostomos is source for images of change and permanence: he invokes earthquakes,2 life as a theatre spectacle where the end of the play indicates the end to a fictive world and a return to the truth and reality of the eternal;3 dreams from which we will wake up;4 life on earth is also a pilgrimage and constant change of place, without home and fatherland. We ought to remain foreigners on earth, being constantly conscious of our eternal home.5 Similar images are used by Gregory the Great: life is a uncertain wandering towards an eternal goal. And when Augustine enlarges his argumentation with the image of the wheel of fortune in order to demonstrate the fickleness of earthly things, he links himself directly to the classical topos of Fortuna which will play an important role in the sixteenth century emblematics of Andreas Alciatus.

1 Homily on 2. Cor. 7, 5; Gen. 23; 1 Tim. 15, 3-4.
2 Sermon on Earthquakes; Homily on 1Tim. 15, 3-4.
3 Sermon on Earthquakes, 5.
4 Letter to Theodorus, 9.
5 Homily on 2 Cor. 16, 4.
But Augustine is no longer interested in the obvious mutability of external human matters. He draws the individual itself and language into the change. It is also remarkable how everything is seen through his personal experiences. We may therefore ask what role the thinking of Augustine has played in the process of individualisation and historicisation which were already on their way to become two of the most important characteristics of the understanding of life in modernity. Obviously, for Augustine there is no doubt that God’s eternity and immutability are the essential ontological principles. Time and change have fallen out of eternity and immutability because of sinful humanity. Thus he forges a direct link to Hesiod’s doctrine of human hybris which caused the fall of the Golden Age. It is therefore imperative that humanity rid itself not of time—which is God’s creature—but from change, from the metabolé of time, the real diabolos, who opposes, and creates conflict and dissent.

It is this understanding of change and permanence which is handed on to the Middle Ages and persists under the form of Christian doctrine as taught by Thomas Aquinas to the Renaissance and beyond. It is in modern times that a reassessment of the relationship becomes necessary.

The Foundation of Modernity

We could continue our investigation into the tradition and function of the topoi of change with many detailed analyses of individual images. Such an investigation would not only demonstrate a continuity of the aesthetic argumentation throughout the Middle Ages, a further amalgamation of antiquity and Christianity in scholastic theology and philosophy, but also a richness of imagery in secular literature which made it a treasure trove for times to come. All these images in the wider arena of our topos serve the purpose to answer the question how human beings can achieve permanence in the middle of impermanence. This quest for stability, and the literary context in which it is debated, are obviously to be seen in their historic context. The traumatic experiences of the Reformation and the wholesale destruction of civilisation wrought in parts of Europe by Thirty Years War pushed diverse answers to the front. On the one hand, there is continuity and consolation in the pre-eminence of the immutability of the spiritual realm, seen as the final refuge and salvation. This solution dominates the literature and arts of the post-Reformation period, the Baroque. On the other hand, there are earlier efforts by humanist writers in Italy, like Alberto Mussato (1261-1329), Dante Alighieri (1266-1321), Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498), Giovanni Pontano (1426-1503) and Angelo Poliziano (1454-1494), but also by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Niccolò Macchiavelli (1469-1527), Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) to find different solutions by investigating and theorising change itself in various ways. The humanists launch a more clandestine than open philosophical attack on the dominant onto-theological foundation of human existence; the new sciences of nature and politics try to measure, calculate and instrumentalise change. All of these have in common that they find the principle of change no longer outside human existence but in the human being itself, in its very humanness. It does not surprise that this period of radical transformation gives the most radical expression to the process.
If we name only a few, it must be Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) who produces the most striking and lasting theory of change to which all subsequent philosophers are indebted: in Leibniz change becomes the essence of humanness itself. A human being is what it is through the energetic development of its possibilities to a perfect reality, by analogy to the metamorphosis of the chrysalis to the perfect butterfly, in the realisation of what every being already is according to its possibilities through constant striving and work. Since Leibniz the essence of humanity is action toward self-realisation. In modernity, only in change is there stability: life itself means mutation, while immutability becomes the greatest obstacle to life. If we go one step further in the history of philosophy, we recognize the consequences of the new ontology in the Critique of Pure Reason of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): the previously immutable principles of human existence, God, soul and cosmos, are put firmly under the command of reason as Transcendental Ideas of Pure Reason. They have no existence outside human thought.

The consequences of this radical transformation of the principles of human spiritual life have been worked out more clearly in literature than in philosophy. Already Leibniz foresaw that the unfettered pursuit of happiness, that is, the full realisation of human potential, would lead necessarily to suffering in two ways: perfect self-realisation would be achieved by the strongest and necessarily impinge on the self-realisation of the weaker; and any restriction put on self-realisation would prohibit perfection. I have shown elsewhere how Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) demonstrated the social and spiritual consequences of the new principles in modernity in most of his works and subjected it to severe aesthetic criticism for everybody to see. His Wilhelm Meister novels are particularly a perfect exposition of the conflict of permanence and change in modernity. We recognise already in these novels the phenomenology of change as the essence of modern self-realisation: it is the principle of personal egoism, economic liberalism, political nationalism, and the rule of a global market. Modern philosophy has drawn the conclusion that total dedication to self-realisation as physical metabolism as well as intellectual reformation or technological innovation has its origin and end in the same ground, in being toward death.

This point has been much debated since Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno believed they had discovered in the Enlightenment's effort toward total self-realisation of reason an inherent dialectic of violence and destruction which Georg Forster had already described in 1780. However, the thinker who has drawn attention to the consequences and influenced the twentieth century in this direction is, in my opinion, Friedrich Nietzsche. In his late work The Genealogy of Morals (1887), he analyses the "Will to Power" of life which is intent solely on self-preservation. Will to power means action, action at any price because only action guarantees life:

To demand of strength not to demonstrate itself as strength, that it should not be a will to overpower, to subjugate, to become master, a thirst for enemies and resistance and triumphs—that is just as nonsensical as to demand of weakness to demonstrate itself as strength. A quantum of power is just as much a quantum of desire, of
will, of activity—more, it is nothing else than just that desiring, willing and acting itself, and it is only because of the seduction of language (and of the petrified fundamental errors of reason in language) which understands and misunderstands all activity to have something acting as a condition, a "subject," can it appear differently. Just as the people separate the flash of lightning from light and take the latter as an action, as effect of something called lightning, in a similar fashion popular morality separates strength from the realisation of strength as if there were an indifferent substrate behind the strong that might be free to demonstrate his strength or not. But there is no such substrate; there is no Being "behind" doing, acting and becoming; "the actor" is only a poetic addition to action—action is everything. (I, 13, emphasis added)

Nietzsche has developed into its radical consequences what Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1742-1814) had spelled out in his First and Second Introductions to the Theory of Science, and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) and Karl Marx (1818-1883) had developed further in their theory of work. From now on, action is the principle of everything. Nietzsche had completed what Leibniz had begun: under the topos of change a new ontology was developed in which change is permanent. Problems arising are now seen as unavoidable already by Sigmund Freud who wrote in his Civilisation and Its Discontents:

At the same time, it would be unfair to reproach civilisation with trying to eliminate strife and competition from human activity. These things are undoubtedly indispensable. (303)

The theory and practice of topoi, of dialectical argumentation offers a rational methodology in comparative literature, especially in the history of themes and ideas. Topoi emerge as solidified places of poetic argumentation that create the ideas which are the visions of reality. The topos of change has been demonstrated as such a place of remembrance of how principles of our understanding of reality have been created. From an understanding of change as metamorphosis, to change as diabolos, to change as essentia et energiea vitae—from change as affirmation of permanence to permanent change—the investigation of the topos has given us a history of argumentation about decisive principles of human existence. The mindless incantation of change in contemporary political, economic, technological debate can now be recognised for what it is, as an instrumentalisation and manipulative use on the intellectual surface of a principal question of humanity.

References


The Ancient and the Modern


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Colonising the Future: Visions of Australia 2000

Paul Longley Arthur

The future has always been a favourite setting for fantasy, but significant temporal milestones such as the end of a millennium attract special attention and become the focal points for fascinated speculation. Almost every day in Australia newspapers herald new fears and fantasies of the year 2000. Further, the word “millennial” has begun to be used as an adjective for describing the cyber culture of the late twentieth century, and as the end of the century looms closer and closer, we are being deluged with speculations on the new millennium as the bearer of destructive computer bugs, aberrant climate trends, natural disasters, nuclear war and the long-awaited second coming of Christ. The millennium is also associated with apocalyptic visions of the ending of the world. In the lead-up to the last millennium, such prophecies led fearful European believers to climb mountaintops in order to be as close as possible to God (Heilbroner 70).

The dominant drive of recent speculation has been towards imagining a negative future. Many people today share the view that the rapid technological advancement characteristic of the late twentieth century is not a sign of “progress” but, rather, is a dehumanising and damaging force, and a symptom of the contradictions of a postmodernist world that is out of control (Heilbroner 70). The popular television series Millennium supports this bleak vision by portraying serial killers emerging worldwide on an unprecedented scale in the years leading up to the year 2000. On a global level, the end of the millennium is characterised by poverty, large-scale unemployment and widespread economic instability to the point that the millennium “itself” is implicated in these negative trends. A prime example is the “millennium bug,” which is blamed in advance for predicted global technological disorder, just as El Niño has become the scapegoat for every climatic upheaval across the world. The millennial moment, like El Niño, takes on a mysterious life of its own. Paradoxically, now that there is very little room left for mystery, with the millennial “crossing” almost upon us, there is more interest than ever in that transition, almost as though the millennial moment is believed to have a special power that is yet to be revealed.

In this paper, I focus on much earlier visions of the late twentieth century, the year 2000 and beyond, drawing upon utopian literature from the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These visions were radically different from the ones confronting us now. The year 2000 has long been seen by many as an important marker in the historical development of Western civilisation and its social systems. As I show, however, far from being the signifier of global disorder that it has recently become, it was seen in the nineteenth-century texts as a threshold to a marvellously brighter future.

The question we are compelled to ask when considering predictions of the future is: to what degree do their visions of the future, written from such remote times and social climates, match the reality of today and the likely reality of the year 2000? The desire to measure visions of the future against the reality that has unfolded is understandably strong. As the writings of figures like Nostradamus demonstrate, there is big business in prophesying about the future. Questioning the motivation for imagining the future, however, is equally important. In utopian fiction, which is the focus of this paper, there has been a politically pointed function: imagining the shape of things to come, to use H. G. Wells’ words, has been utilised as a means of interrogating the social systems of the present with the aim of offering alternatives.

In the first section of this paper, I discuss eighteenth- and nineteenth-century utopian predictions of the future and show how they acted as persuasive models for social change. In the second, I focus on two texts, written by Australians and set in a future Australia. Both were published in the 1880s and both are feminist utopias. I read these texts as feminist documents but show that they also lend themselves to postcolonial readings which are highly significant in a contemporary Australian context.

Imaginary Travel and the Future

Below is a quotation from Samuel Madden’s rare eighteenth-century text Memoirs of the Twentieth Century. First published in 1733, it takes the form of a series of fictional letters written, the reader is told, in the closing years of the twentieth century and passed on to the narrator of the story by a genie. The following, very “timely” passage is taken from a letter dated 19 December 1997, 264 years after the text was first published. The focus of these fictional letters is on the imagined power of the great Vatican Empire, which, it is predicted, will have become the greatest global imperial force by 1997. This has not proved itself to be an accurate prediction. Neither, we must hope, is the text’s prediction that the year 2000 will mark the ending of the world. The following passage describes a great telescope which has been given as a gift to the Lord High Treasurer of the Empire of Great Britain:

You may discern evidently with this [telescope], not only the Hills, Rivers, Vallies and Forests, but real Cities on the Moon, that seem nearly to resemble our own, and what is still more, even mountains and seas in Venus and the other Planets. Nay some of our astronomers have gone so far as to aver, they could distinguish the times of plowing, and harvest there, by the colour of the face of the Earth [. . .]. (137)

In one sense, this prediction of 1997 is accurate. Technology, in the form of giant telescopes, is now readily available and it enables us to view the
moon in great detail. More importantly, though, this quotation is significant in the context of this discussion because it illustrates a standard trait of utopian fiction, that is, the imagining of cities very much like our own, and in this case cities on the moon.

Visions of the future, such as Memoirs of the Twentieth Century, were not simply innocent projections of the European imagination. In the vast body of utopian literature published in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a politically pointed and predetermined function: unknown domains, such as the future, other planets, uncharted areas of the globe and underwater worlds, were all utilised as sites for satirically playing out the moral and political debates of contemporary Western societies (primarily Europe and America). The traditional goal of utopian representation has been to improve a society by highlighting and commenting on negative social and political aspects. This has usually been done by envisaging a place which is either miraculously free of those vices or brought down by them in exaggerated forms (Booker 4).

Utopian texts, however, also acted as persuasive models for picturing the realities of far away places and of the future. One of the central points of this paper is that utopian visions have often acted as blueprints for real action and social change. Predictions of the future, therefore, must not be dismissed as mere fantasies, but instead read as influential political documents because they rehearsed and validated visions of certain kinds of futures.

Some examples of utopias acted as blueprints for action more than others. Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward 2000-1887 is one example. In his own words, he meant the novel to be read “in all seriousness, as a forecast” (qtd. in Clarke 42). Looking Backward proved to be extremely popular and influential. As Bellamy explained, many years after it was first published:

Instead of a mere fairy tale of social perfection, it became a vehicle of a definite scheme of industrial organisation [. . .]. Barely enough story was left to decently drape the skeleton of the argument and not enough, I fear, in spots, for even that purpose. (xiii)

Its political function was very clear to contemporary readers. Written in a time of unequal distribution of wealth and the growing organisation of labour and capital, Looking Backward supported Bellamy’s political convictions and served as an inspiration for his National Party (Booker 14).

With uncanny accuracy, the world of 2000 in Looking Backwards is one in which credit cards are widely accepted:

An American credit card [. . .] is just as good in Europe as American gold used to be, and on precisely the same condition, namely, that it be exchanged into the currency of the country you are travelling in. (116)

Looking Backward signalled the start of a great era for the utopian novel in America. From 1888 until 1900, nearly one hundred utopian novels were published, and many were written in direct response to Bellamy’s text (Bellamy vi). This was also known as the great period of the utopian novel
and has ironically been labelled as utopia’s “golden age” Britain (Albinski, “Laws” 51).

There is a single factor, it has been argued, which greatly influenced American writers such as Bellamy in the late nineteenth century. That factor was the conquering of the great American frontier. In the Introduction to the 1957 edition of *Looking Backward*, the editor argues that the American frontier had acted as an escape for writers because it “served as the safety valve for much of [America’s] discontent” (Bellamy vi). The future, as a setting for utopian fiction, it is argued, effectively replaced the American frontier as an imagined alternative space. Utopias, by their very definition, need fictional settings (“utopia” literally means “no-place”). Historically, as the world was progressively charted by European explorers, there was less and less potential for utopian fiction to be set in an earthly location and in the present time. The future provided a whole new domain where existing places could be imagined in new ways. As one critic has noted, therefore, late nineteenth-century utopias differ from most of the earlier utopias in that their visions are set in the future rather than in isolated areas of the Earth or on another planet, and that their authors make a direct connection between the imperfect world in which they lived and the more perfect world of the future (Albinski, Women’s Utopias 10).

**Future Australia**

The discussion now turns to two texts, both written in the 1880s, which present two very different images of the year 2000 and the early twenty-first century. Both are feminist utopias set in a future Australia. These examples show that the current widespread fascination with the transition to the next millennium is not a preoccupation only of the late twentieth century.

Australia and the region of the Antipodes have been a favourite setting for utopian fiction since at least 350 BC, when the Greek Theopompus imagined a mythical land beyond the limits of Europe’s knowledge and home to “big and mighty beasts” and gigantic men who “in the same climate exceed the stature of us twice” (qtd. in Wood 1). The period during which most utopian texts set in the Antipodes were published roughly spans the hundred years between 1680 and 1780 (see Fausett). At this point, Australia was colonised and the region no longer offered the same potential to utopian writers. Like the American frontier, Australia’s interior then became a popular setting for fantasy, and it continues to be a popular setting even now.

The two texts I am going to discuss have explicit feminist agendas. However, as I bring out in my readings, European utopian fantasies set in the Antipodes were often also expressions of the colonial desire to improve the world of Europe by expanding its control of land spaces elsewhere. Accordingly, European figures were regularly portrayed taking control of imagined Antipodean societies and civilising them with European knowledge systems. Colonialism plays an important role in the visions of the future which are the subject of this section, and it is a theme which reflects the social context of the late nineteenth century in Australia. Historically, the
period represents the height of British global imperial power. In response to
the power of Europe, this was a time of unprecedented nationalism and
republicanism in Australia (McKenna 3).

_A Few Hours in a Far-Off Age_ was written by Henrietta Dugdale and first
published in 1883. The setting is two million years into the future, and the
story follows a tour through an “instructional gallery,” an innovative
Australian educational facility used to teach students about the past.¹ In the
instructional gallery, the focus is on an historical period named the “Age of
Blood” or “Great Transition Age,” a Christian era which ended in the early
twenty-first century when “true ethics began to stir in all human kind to
noble thoughts, truthfulness and benevolence” (26). The Age of Blood is
presented as a barbaric time and in complete contrast with the apparent
perfection of the world in which the story is set. Children touring the
gallery, for example, cannot believe they are related to the ancient
twentieth-century Australians. As one of them remarks, “I used to
fervently hope some talented naturalist would discover it had been all a
mistake” (14).

In its most positive forms, utopian visions characteristically attempt to
eliminate social conflict, accident and tragedy (Elliott 104). _A Few Hours in
a Far-Off Age_ presents exactly this kind of image of a future society. The
narrator pauses regularly to reflect on the perfect surroundings. One
passage, for example, reads:

> I stand in the doorway of an immense building [...]. A magnificent
scene is before me [...]. I see a city in which are combined grandeur,
cleanliness, order and picturesque loveliness [...]. (5)

In characteristic utopian style, the old world of the past is compared with
the new and better world of the future. In the new world the narrator
observes that there is

> No smoke-disfigured architecture. No stream of poisonous filth,
running with ferocious delight on its deathly errand. No besotted-
looking creatures offending passers-by with debasing language. No
jails. No knots of babbling men standing around entrances to public-
houses, vieing with each other for destruction of intelligence. (6)

The text consistently casts the past in highly negative terms.

_A Few Hours in a Far-Off Age_ is dedicated to Justice Higinbotham, a
nineteenth-century judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria. Higinbotham, a
prominent public advocate of women’s political rights remembered in
Melbourne in the form of a prominent statue, is mentioned in the story
itself and is celebrated in the instructional gallery for his insight (21). This
text presents a feminist vision of an ideal future, and the year 2000 is
remembered as the time when great advances were made to the benefit of

¹ The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the time of the first great exhibitions
in Australia and the concept of the instructional gallery is a direct product of this
historical period (Melbourne’s famous exhibition buildings, for example, were built
during this period).
women. In the early twenty-first century, for example, it was discovered that women, who are described as the “Infinite Intelligence,” are mentally superior to men. The men of the “rude ages,” that is, our present time, are said to have been “ignorant” (13), “half savages” (15) of “puny intelligence,” and reliant on “ape logic” (11). In this future world, horses are extinct, but in a comical reference to *Gulliver’s Travels*, the narrator explains that

Many writers of the twenty-first century affirm that [the horse’s] intelligence often exceeded that of its owner. (88)

It must be assumed, of course, that the narrator is referring to male rather than female owners.

“Women,” as the narrator explains, “up till past the nineteenth century were really slaves in all but the name” (10). Accordingly, the terms “husband” and “wife” have been abandoned because they signified a master/slave relationship (73). At one point in the story, a group of children stop by a cabinet labelled “Appliances for voluntary torture, used chiefly by women,” which includes jewellery as well as rib squeezers (63). Many of these instruments, it is noted, were used by women “of notably small minds” even until the end of the twentieth century, before being finally abolished (63).

Jewellery today is increasingly popular and acceptable. The text’s vision, therefore, has not proved itself to be true. In many ways, nevertheless, the story gives a surprisingly accurate portrait of our time. Certainly feminism has caused unprecedented changes in the course of the twentieth century. One of the main points I want to bring out in my readings of these texts is that imagining the future was a way of claiming the benefits of certain kinds of futures. The most explicit political agenda in *A Few Hours in a Far-Off Age* is a feminist agenda. I would argue, however, that it is equally important to consider this text from a postcolonial reading position.

The setting is an Australia of the future. Australia, as we know it, however, has long since disappeared. As the narrator explains:

Nearly two million years ago our country only formed the bottom to a tempestuous sea, often exceedingly dangerous to navigators bound from Australia to a group of islands (New Zealand) long since disappeared [. . .]. The Southern Hemisphere slipped out of the world’s strife, and, as if weary of perverse ignorance, lay mourning and resting under a long glacial period [. . .]. (23)

A new and magnificent country called Alethia has arisen (23). It is located largely in the Pacific Ocean as we know it, but also incorporates the old site of Melbourne. The city of Melbourne is described as having been “old” and “bright,” but “very wicked” (23). In the new world of Alethia, there is a noticeable absence of indigenous people. The only references are to a “beautiful half-caste” who has “never been distorted by rib-squeezers” (58) and a city called Waratah, which is an Aboriginal name and the state flower of New South Wales (82).

The fictional history of Alethia’s rise to magnificence repeats and reinforces eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colonial patterns by the fact
that colonisers from the northern hemisphere came to Alethia and forcibly imposed their concept of civilisation (24). Early Alethians resisted the invaders, but, ironically, at the site of the conflict there is now an instructional gallery celebrating the success of northern civilisation in the southern hemisphere. Only at one point is there a voice speaking from an Australian as opposed to a European perspective. In a comical moment, "ancient Britons modelled after well-executed drawings" are mistaken for apes (30).

The second text I want to discuss is *Anno Domini 2000, or, Woman's Destiny*, written by Julius Vogel and first published in 1889. The story opens in Melbourne in the year 2000 (Melbourne, it seems, was a popular setting for futuristic fiction). Human kind has progressed in the twentieth century more than in any other (27), and this text, like the earlier one, is a feminist vision of the future. As the narrator explains, echoing the earlier text discussed in this paper,

It has [...] come to be accepted that the bodily power is greater in man, and the mental power larger in woman. So to speak, woman has become the guiding, man the executive, force of the world. (29)

A number of interweaving stories constitute the narrative. One is the story of Hilda Fitzherbert, a woman parliamentarian who successfully campaigns for women to have the same hereditary rights as men (50 and 397). The setting of the novel is also utopian in a socialist sense. As the narrator explains:

No one in the British Empire was satisfied with less than sufficient house accommodation, substantial though plain food, and convenient, decent attire. (264)

In this socialist world, "crime as an occupation has become unknown" (30).

Equally prominent as the feminist theme in the text is the theme of European colonialism and imperial power. The narrator explains that

Great Britain, as it used to be called, has long ceased to be a bundle of sticks. The British dominions have been consolidated into the empire of United Britain; and not only is it the most powerful empire on the globe, but at present no sign is shown of any tendency to weakness or decay. (32)

The Empire of United Britain is vast, and incorporates Egypt, Belgium, the ports bordering the English Channel and Straits of Dover, and the whole of South Africa (34). Although London remains the centre of the Empire because of the luxury in which people live there (235), by the year 2000 the Canadian, Australasian and Cape colonies were "rich, populous, and powerful. United, they far exceeded in importance the original mother-country" (33).

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1 The figure of the woman parliamentarian was extremely popular in late nineteenth-century utopian fiction, but did not become a reality in the British House of Commons until after 1920 (Albinski, "Laws" 52).
Colonising the Future

This vision of the Empire of United Britain has shown itself to be highly inaccurate. It was based on a belief that Britain would continue to expand its territories at the same rate as at the end of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century has, of course, been characterised by massive global decolonisation. Another inaccurate prediction in the text is that Ireland would have become the most prosperous country in the world by the year 2000 (240). This is unlikely. Nevertheless, Ireland’s economy is said to be one of the fastest growing in the world today.

Despite the implausible picture Anno Domini 2000 paints of the year 2000, the text does make one prediction which is accurate and highly relevant to contemporary Australian politics. One of the interweaving stories in the narrative is that of Australia’s breaking away from the great empire of United Britain. The question of “whether Australia would be found to be quite large and powerful enough to constitute an empire of itself” is directly posed (154). Secret meetings are held, a Reginald Paramatta is elected to be the first Emperor (156), and yet, at the crucial moment, the dissenters are dramatically stopped in their tracks by a form of paralysing artificial magnetism (159). A large portion of Anno Domini 2000 is dedicated to the question of whether Australia could stand alone and constitute itself as an independent nation in the year 2000. Mark McKenna, in The Captive Republic, cites two distinct periods of Australian republicanism in the nineteenth century. One is the decade before self-government in 1856, and the other the 15 years before federation in 1905. Anno Domini 2000, therefore, is a product of late nineteenth-century republicanism, and fascinatingly, one hundred years later, we are faced with very similar issues in Australia today. Time will tell how accurate its vision may be. Public voting for Australia’s constitutional convention closed at the end of 1997, and appropriately, in the context of the Start Trek and Endgame conference, the West Australian newspaper recently referred to the convention as “the end game in a two-century old fixation” (Aisbett 2).

Predictions can only be guesses, however educated they may be. In the words of one critic, they are all marvels of “insight, hindsight and blindsight” (Heilbroner 116). Utopian visions, by their own commitment, are often very narrow visions explicitly designed to support particular political agendas. In fact, the recognition that utopia can be perfect only for some has led to a complete distrust of utopian visions in the twentieth century. Critics have asked whether a perfect place would in fact be desirable. In other words, how would we gauge happiness if there were no grief or suffering? Aldous Huxley’s well-known novel Brave New World, for example, is a negative utopia, filled with a sense of social stagnation. Peter Fitting, commenting on recent feminist utopian fiction, has argued that the feminist utopias of recent fiction are not imagined worlds where “values and ideals of feminism have been extended to much of the planet,” as in the case of the texts discussed in this paper, but rather offer “depressing images of a brutal re-establishment of capitalist patriarchy” (Fitting 142).

As I have shown in this paper, utopian visions say as much about the time of their writing as they do about the future. Read today, the examples I have discussed illustrate the ongoing historical fascination with millennial markers as well as offering a means of comparing our visions of the year 2000 with
those from a very different time period in Australia. As predictions, they offer a tantalising window into a far removed world where “our” time was only a hazy horizon and a space of the imaginary.

References


Can Cultural Studies Survive the Millennium? Or, The Battle of the Books Revisited

James Donald

Humanities research generates knowledge about the human condition and experience—but its share of government research funding has decreased during the past ten years.

_The Australian_, 8 April 1998

I live in a landscape of ideological ruins.

Juan Goytisolo, _Landscape After the Battle_

In the _Times Literary Review_ a few years ago, the historian of ideas Stefan Collini once neatly characterized cultural studies as “part of the noise made by the great academic ice-floes of Literature, Sociology, Anthropology and so on, as their mass shifts and breaks apart.” In this view, cultural studies is a symptom of disciplinary decomposition and reformation. If Collini is right, and by and large I think he is, then it comes as a shock to realise that, as we approach the millennium, this symptom of transition is itself well on the way to being half a century old.¹ This may then be a good moment to speculate on the future directions of cultural studies—if it has a future, that is. In millenarian mode, we might wonder whether the whole thing is coming to end, or whether it still promises a new dawn. I prefer to approach the question in a more mundane register. Why might it be desirable that cultural studies as a discipline or an academic field should survive the millennium? And what circumstances will decide whether or not it does?

Towards 2000

As I started to think about these questions, I wondered whether, given its suitably millennial title, Raymond Williams’s late work _Towards 2000_ might provide a suitable starting point. When I looked at the book again, though, the first thing that struck me is how differently it reads from the general run

¹ That is using the conventional dating of its emergence around the British New Left’s turn to questions of culture in the mid 1950s. I realise that different national schools of cultural studies have developed their own myths of origin, but none that I know of radically affects the dating.
of cultural studies writing today. Williams shows no interest here in the way that cultural texts or practices of representation are supposed to buttress or subvert relations of power, nor in whether reading them differently might constitute part of a strategy for producing significant social change.

It is important to remember that the book was published in 1983, four years into Margaret Thatcher’s first government in the UK and a year after the Falklands/Malvinas War. That may explain the often querulous and embattled tone of the book, and also why its style, its assumptions and the tenor of its argument seem already curiously anachronistic. Although Williams claims to look forward to the millennium, Towards 2000 now appears strikingly pre-1989 in its approach to questions of policy, questions of community and identity, and questions of nationhood and democracy. Williams also, deliberately, looks backwards from the early eighties. The book is in a way pre-1968 as well as pre-1989. It marks a self-conscious return to the agenda Williams set himself in The Long Revolution at the turn of the 1960s, even to the extent of reprinting the final chapter of the earlier book as the first chapter of Towards 2000. The purpose of this reconsideration is to ask, in the changed political circumstances of 1983, what the conditions would be for creating what Williams identified in 1961 as a common culture and an educated and participatory democracy.

Despite my lack of sympathy for many aspects of the book, there is still something about the way in which Williams defines his task that I think is absolutely right. What I like is his emphasis on the need to produce such a culture and such a democracy. I prefer John Dewey’s maxim that “the work of education is constructive, not critical” to the emphasis on resistance that came to dominate much of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s. My problem with Williams’s approach, and not just in Towards 2000, arises from his assumption that what needs to be constructed is a common culture, and his apparent inability to imagine a democratic culture in any terms other than those of a lost ideal of community. This formulation, by condensing Williams’s concepts of common culture and community, probably does him an injustice. The former is more dialogic and open-ended than the latter, somewhat akin to Habermas’s image of the public sphere. However, he does himself insist that the question of a common culture is “only soluble in a context of material community and by the full democratic process” (Culture and Society 333; emphasis added). Williams consistently talks about the virtues of “rooted settlement” and “the idea of settlement” as “positive and unquestioned,” as often as not invoking the Black Mountains village of his childhood. What motivated all his work, and so in a sense inaugurated cultural studies, was the impulse to create, or re-create, the community capable of restoring that lost sense of belonging, and so of healing—or at least ameliorating—the psychic wounds of modernity.

This is a problem in part because it leads to a conceptual opposition between an ideal of real community or identity and the supposedly spurious formal identity of citizenship. Without going into the argument, here I shall just

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1 This is the aspect of Towards 2000 that has been so sharply criticised by Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. For a more extensive consideration of Williams’s version of community, see
assert that Williams’s error is to assume that community is the answer to
the political project of cultural studies, rather than its organising question. For me, community entails not a model of how we should live together, but the question of how we can live together—without assuming that the answer involves any shared or common essence. I go along with Jean-Luc Nancy’s argument that to think of community as essence represents a closure of the political,

because it assigns to community a common being, whereas
community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of
existence inasmuch as it is in common, but without letting itself be
absorbed into a common substance. (xxxviii)

Towards 2000 cannot tell us what cultural studies should look like after the millennium. Nevertheless, the very nature of this failure offers a salutary reminder of the limited sense in which cultural studies is a political project. It is political to the extent that it is centrally concerned with the question of community. For me at least, it follows that cultural studies is least effectively political when uttering gestural denunciations of culture’s complicity with power. It is most practically political when it provides a forum for systematic reflection on imaginable ways of living together.

This approach respects the inherently interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies. It entails at least three types of question about community and democracy. The first is philosophical, at least in Foucault’s sense of being a critical reflection on modernity: what does it mean to live in the present? The second is sociological: what has made it possible to live together in the present of modernity? And then there is the question of cultural studies proper: what are the symbolic resources that make it possible for us to live together in the present?¹

Although mine is both an extremely abstract way of thinking, and a
tendentious one, at least this approach makes it possible to take the long
historical view of cultural studies that the millennium invites. However new
the field or discipline of cultural studies may be, the space it occupies and the
role it performs have a long prehistory in modernity. Let me give a sense of
this perspective by creating, briefly and polemically, a reasonably
fictional history of these questions. As I tell it, the story takes the form of
a sequence of fin-de-siècle controversies: four rounds in an unresolved battle
of the books.

The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns

The original battle of the books was a cultural conflict that traumatised
France between 1687 and 1715. Joan De Jean has brilliantly reconstructed

¹ This offers a slightly different route to a definition of culture close to that offered by John Frow and Meaghan Morris: “culture not as organic expression of a community, nor as an autonomous sphere of aesthetic forms, but as a contested and conflictual set of practices of representation bound up with the processes of formation and re-formation of social groups.” Representation is less central to my account.
this so-called Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. She sees the end of the seventeenth century as the first *fin de siècle* because the Moderns’ claim that France had reached a state of perfection generated a mentality of *après nous le déluge*. What was at stake above all in the conflict was the question of where ultimate cultural authority is located. Did it reside, as the Ancients insisted, in the revealed truths and precepts of Tradition and Antiquity? Or was it produced, as the Moderns countered, through an appeal to experiential authenticity as articulated in literature and subjected to the critical scrutiny of the public?

From this protracted struggle, claims De Jean, there emerged two features that continue to dominate our intellectual landscape. First, taking a stern critical distance from Habermas, she claims that it was through the critical discussion of literature and its significance in France during this period that a *public sphere* in the modern sense first came into being. Second, and providing the raw material for this public scrutiny, were a new language and theory of the *emotions*—a new literature and culture of *interiority*.

De Jean has some provocative things to say about the parallels between the French Quarrel of three centuries ago and the Culture Wars in the United States at the end of the millennium. Especially timely are her comments on the failure of the Moderns to develop an educational strategy, and the consequent triumph of the conservative Ancients in defining the future of French higher education. More important for my argument, however, is a nexus of three questions that she identifies. These define what I take to be the intellectual and educational *space* that cultural studies attempts to occupy.

The first question, which (as I have said) remains the main bone of contention that links the Quarrel to the Culture Wars, is that of cultural authority. Today that means not just who has the authority to speak in the name of culture. Rather it concerns the power to *authorise* culture. Does that power reside in tradition, as today’s Ancients like Allan Bloom believe it must: in the values of Western civilisation and the literary canon? Or is culture ordinary, as our Moderns believe, and experience the touchstone of authority? This leads to the second question: not just *experience*, but the broader question of subject formation within the field of culture. Is the subject formed through acculturation into the works and values that define the culture? Or is this more a process of expressing an identity, the identity of the self and also the shared identity of community? And that is the third question: the question of the community or public that enacts and legitimates cultural authority, and within which subject formation is achieved.

**The Conflict of the Faculties**

The second round in my imaginary battle of the books takes place in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. It concerns again questions of cultural authority, subject formation and community, but linked now to the emergence of the modern university, its disposition of knowledge, and an Enlightenment conception of Reason. Kant’s fragmented text *The Conflict of the Faculties* has become the object of intense scrutiny since Derrida focused his attention on it in his paper “Mochlos, or The Conflict
of the Faculties” in 1980.\textsuperscript{1} \textit{The Conflict of the Faculties} figures centrally (although in different ways) in important recent work on the university and the humanities in a series of articles by Ian Hunter and in Bill Readings’s book \textit{The University in Ruins}.\textsuperscript{2} Hunter warns off those anyone who is tempted to rip the text from its very specific historical context and use it to invent myths of origin (and destiny) for the humanities. Let me plead partly guilty, but also partly innocent, to the extent that the importance of the text is, for me, emblematic rather than empirical. My concern is less whether it played any significant part in determining the subsequent history of universities than the symptoms of the way that its treatment of cultural authority, subject formation, and community continues to be read today. I am interested less in its truth for its own \textit{fin de siècle} than in its effective truth now.

The conflict Kant is concerned with is that between the university’s higher faculties of Law, Medicine and Theology, and the lower faculty of Philosophy (which we can take to be broader in scope than what we would today think of as Philosophy, although not identical with the Humanities). What divides them is again the question of authority. What makes the higher faculties higher is that they are concerned with issues in which the state and the professions have a legitimate interest. In today’s terms, they are concerned with vocational outcomes. They train lawyers, doctors and priests. It is therefore inevitable, and probably desirable, that the university should be accountable to the authority of external agencies for the quality of the education provided. What makes Philosophy a lower faculty is that its sole responsibility is to the authority of Reason. As Kant dryly observes: “The reason why this faculty, despite its great prerogative (freedom), is called the lower faculty lies in human nature: for a man who can give commands, even though he is someone else’s humble servant, is considered more distinguished than a free man who has no one under his commands” (qtd. in Rand viii).

The tension between worldly interests and the purity of Reason is constitutive of the modern university; or at least of what Bill Readings calls the University of Reason. At issue, at least in part, is the question of subject formation, or (as Ian Hunter might prefer, given his scepticism about the concept of subjectivity) the inculcation of ethical comportments. What sort of people does the university make up? Is its role primarily to train students in the skills, competences and styles of analytical thought necessary to be a good lawyer, a good doctor, a good theologian or a good anything else? Or is it to train them in the disinterested practice of Reason, to be, in some sense, philosophers? For Kant, whose modesty in placing Philosophy below the other faculties was (as we have seen) purely rhetorical, the practice of Reason was a stern discipline, in which immediate sensory or

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1} In Richard Rand, ed., \textit{Logomachia: The Conflict of the Faculties} (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P 1992).}

experiential responses are to be treated with extreme suspicion and subordinated to the demands of the rational. Here, then, the conflict over cultural authority is fought out less between Tradition and Experience than between Worldliness and Reason.

The social and political theorist David Owen offers a useful definition of how Kant’s topical and in some ways quite narrow concerns translate into the broader question I have identified about subject formation in relation to cultural authority. For Owen, post-Kantian practices of critique entail the pursuit of maturity through reflection on modernity, where this reflection is articulated via a historical reconstruction in the present. While Kant’s critical enterprise is concerned with our maturity (or lack of it), it is only after Kant that the activity of critique becomes historical and the question of maturity (what is the possibility of achieving maturity given the conditions of the present?) is tied to the question of modernity (what is the character of our historical being in the present?). In this context, [...] to engage in critical reflection is to pose three questions: What is maturity? What is modernity? What is the relationship between maturity and modernity? (1)

In the (no doubt hypothetical) University of Reason, personal maturity is to be achieved through the disciplines within the critical community. The community of Reason, analogous to the literary public identified by De Jean and (I would add) the media public identified by Habermas, is of course the University itself. This community is both defined and policed by the faculty of Philosophy. The problem with the “higher” faculties is that their worldliness renders them vulnerable to the blind acceptance of traditional authority and so to superstition. That is why their truth claims have always to be subject to the adjudication of the Philosophers. This in turn defines the public role of the University. Its authority to comment on matters of public interest also rests on the disinterested and normative status of Reason within it. That is why, for Kant, the lower faculty is in reality the highest.

Kant’s new configuration of the cultural authority of Reason and the formation of rational subjects within the community of the university was soon modified to produce what Readings calls the University of Culture. It was reworked in two significant ways. First, Schiller offered a profoundly important modification to Kant’s version of education as subject formation when he proposed that the disciplines of aesthetic education could provide a technique of self-formation that is capable of healing, or at least ameliorating, the psychic wounds of modernity.1 Second, Herder developed an account of culture that linked it decisively to the nation: the national language as the embodiment and creator of national community. What emerges in the light of these modifications? First, subject formation is conceived as Bildung: the cultivation or formation or education of

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1 The echo of my description of Raymond Williams’s project is deliberate. That does not mean, however, that I consider Williams to be just a latter-day Schiller, as Hunter sometimes seems to imply. For instance, Mark Gibson has persuaded me of the importance of a quite different Humean scepticism in Williams’s work.
character, evident as much (or probably more) in the Bildungsroman narrative of a young hero's troubled acquisition of maturity as in any actual university programs. Second, cultural authority is invested in Wissenschaft: not this faculty or that field of knowledge, but the unifying speculative science underlying, and so inherent in, any specific pursuit of disciplinary knowledge. Hence there emerged a new emphasis on the production of knowledge (now through the new idea of research) as the embodiment of that Kultur in relation to which the citizen-subjects of a post-absolutist nation state could be formed.

This, certainly, was the agenda of von Humboldt and Schleiermacher in setting up the University of Berlin at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Readings summarises the argument:

Through Bildung, the nation-state can achieve scientifically the cultural unity that the Greeks once possessed naturally. The nation-state will come to re-embody the unity that the multiplication and disciplinary separation of knowledges have imposed in the intellectual sphere, that the division of labour has imposed in the social sphere. [. . .] As Humboldt puts it, the principle of culture embodied in the University fuses the advancement of objective science (cultural knowledge) with subjective spiritual and moral training (cultivation). (65-66)

This confirms how the "Idea" of the modern university is structured around the nexus of questions I have claimed define the ground of cultural studies: the institutional articulation of epistemological authority (Wissenschaft), the formation of citizen-subjects (Bildung), and the community of the cultural nation (Kultur).

**Authority and Disenchantment**

These issues continued to dominate discussion of the university throughout the nineteenth century. What changed was that God died. The loss of faith in any transcendent authority meant that the questions had to be radically rethought for a world that is ultimately meaningless. This crisis of faith defined the end of the nineteenth century as the most self-conscious of fins de siècle.

One response to the death of God and the crisis of cultural authority is already well-known in both cultural studies and comparative literature. This is the story of how literature rather than philosophy, and specifically the study of one national literature called English, became the central ethical discourse of culture in Anglophone universities. The new discipline of English perpetuated an Idealist notion of Bildung while linking it to an organic vision of a unified (or unifying) national culture, which was itself seen to be increasingly at odds with the social and cultural consequences of industrial society. Something of that story is to be found in Newman's ideas about the university, although for him, of course, cultural authority remained vested absolutely in the Church.¹

¹ That distinction helps to explain the differences between the development of German and
The same story also informs the conventional history that sees the prehistory of cultural studies in a lineage that runs from Arnold on *Culture and Anarchy* through Leavis on *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* to Williams on *Culture and Society*. The trouble with that version of the *fin de siècle* is that, as Ian Hunter rightly complains, it traps cultural studies within the tradition of what he calls cultural prophecy. That is, as I interpret him, there has been a failure to treat the new discipline’s hubristic claims to cultural and ethical authority with the same scepticism it brings to bear on all other claims to such authority.

In place of that genealogy of cultural studies, I prefer to offer an account of cultural science wrought within late nineteenth-century German sociology. This was a self-consciously *fin de siècle* discourse. It worked through Nietzsche’s critique of Kantian Reason, seeing how his perspectivism called into question the authoritative claims of either Reason or *Kultur* or Literature by insisting on their contingency. In this conflict, the key text is Max Weber’s *Science as a Vocation*. (“Science” is an unavoidably inadequate and misleading translation of *Wissenschaft*. “Vocation” translates *Beruf*, which shares the English word’s twin connotations of occupation or career and calling or destiny.)

*Science as a Vocation* remains fascinating on several levels. It combines a hard-headed prescience about the material conditions of university employment with a sophisticated sensitivity to the question of how university education should relate to the logics of industrial production. For the purposes of my argument, though, what is especially important is the way that Weber addresses some of the key questions I have identified as arising once we accept that the world is inherently meaningless. What then can be the cultural authority of either Reason or experience? How might the mature and autonomous subject capable of exercising critique be formed? What is the relationship between critique and politics?

For a start, Weber is acid in his rejection of Romantic notions about experience and self-cultivation as the locus of cultural authority. Inspired by a cult of street corners and periodicals, people—and especially youth—“belabour themselves in trying to ‘experience’ life.” If they can’t quite manage it, well, “we must at least pretend to have this gift of grace” (Weber 137). Elsewhere, Weber is equally forthright in his insistence on the contingent rather than absolute authority of Reason and Science: “the belief in the value of scientific truth is the product of certain cultures and is not a product of man’s original nature” (Owen 87). It follows that, as Owen

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English universities. Oxford and Cambridge also continued to cede authority, at least formally and usually substantively, to the Church. Hence, perhaps, their continuing commitment to the transmission of knowledge and their scepticism towards research through the nineteenth century and beyond.

1 There is a history to be written of the shifting valorizations of *civilization and culture* in the various historical culture wars. Usage seems to reflect in part the combatants’ intellectual affiliation or affinity with either Germany or France.

2 Readings sadly misses *Science as a Vocation* out of his argument, but both Owen and Hunter in his article “Personality as a Vocation” (in Hunter et al.) deal with it at some length.
summarises Weber, "cultural science as a reflection on culture operates in terms of thorough-going reflexivity in relation to itself as a product of culture" (88-89). Science, then, is necessarily contingent, and therefore needs to be justified. But how can science justify itself if its own authority is always in question?

Science [. . .] presupposes that what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is "worth being known." In this obviously are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. (Weber 143; Owen 89)

As Hunter observes, following Weber, this applies to the aesthetic and cultural sciences just as much as to medicine or jurisprudence or any other field. "They presume the value of self-cultivation associated with a particular practice of cultural analysis but—as we can see with a vengeance today—this value lacks self-evidence beyond the practice that supports it" (Hunter, "Personality" 45).

The implication is that if the value judgements we make about how to live cannot be justified in terms either of tradition or a transcendent scientific foundation, then they become a matter of personal, and in some sense arbitrary, decision. Owen puts it like this:

whereas classical social theories "start from the presupposition that the principle of binding force itself, the criterion of legality, can be discovered and derived from man's existence in the world," the radical dismantling of all received public values at the end of the nineteenth century makes such a proposition, for Weber, an intellectual absurdity. (91)1

Here the implosion of existing forms of cultural and epistemological authority becomes enmeshed with the possibility of community as the repository of value. If science can neither create values, nor ground the presupposition of its own value, then how can there be any generally binding force holding together the public sphere that we saw emerging with the French Moderns and institutionalised in the University of Reason and the University of Culture? As Weber puts it in Science as a Vocation, "the ultimate and sublime values have retreated from public life" (Weber 155; see also Owen 90ff.).

What then are the possibilities for subject formation and community around the project of cultural science? The ungroundable decision to pursue cultural science as a vocation is quite different from the ideal of self-cultivation through aesthetic education. Hunter puts it like this:

The ethical character of cultivation thus does not lie in the goal of a true self whose completeness constitutes a synthetic ideal for all the particular disciplines of cultivation. It lies instead inside a given

discipline whose ethos forms a self to which it is possible to be true. (“Personality” 42)

Hence Weber’s insistence on commitment to a specific specialism if Wissenschaft is to contribute to mature self-formation (personality) in a meaningless world.

In the field of science only he who is devoted solely to the work at hand has “personality.” [. . .] In the field of science [. . .] the man who makes himself the impresario of the subject to which he should be devoted, and steps upon the stage and seeks to legitimate himself through “experience,” asking: How can I prove that I am something other than a mere “specialist” and how can I manage to say something in form or in content that nobody else has ever said?—such a man is no “personality.” Today such conduct is a crowd phenomenon, and it always makes a petty impression and debases the one who is thus concerned. Instead of this, an inner devotion to the task, and that alone, should lift the scientist to the height and dignity of the subject he pretends to serve. (Weber 137)

It is only because of its division into specialist fields of knowledge and disciplines of cultivation, not despite it, that Wissenschaft can continue to provide a vocation.

Science today is a “vocation” organised in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe. This, to be sure, is the inescapable condition of our historical situation. We cannot evade it so long as we remain true to ourselves. (152)

The skills and cultivated self of the cultural scientist or humanities scholar are neither more nor less vocational or specialist or humane than those of the medical or legal scholar, or the natural or social scientist. This is, in a sense, to restate Weber’s claim that “the ultimate and sublime values have retreated from public life.” It also explains why his insistence on value neutrality and intellectual probity reflect his acknowledgment of the will to power as a real and perceived question for the scientist, not a naïve belief that teaching or research can ever be cleansed of passions and presuppositions. Value neutrality is entailed in the ungrounded decision to commit to knowledge as a vocation. Intellectual probity is not merely deference to the fact-value distinction. Rather, it represents Weber’s attempt to solve the problem of acknowledging both the presupposition that the knowledge produced through scientific activity is worth knowing, and also Nietzsche’s claim that the value of truth cannot be scientifically grounded. Owen summarises Weber’s answer:

Weber’s resolution of this dilemma is to root the possibility of scientific activity in the “personality” of the scientist, that is to say, in the integrity of the scientist’s “irrational” commitment to truth as an ultimate value. In other words, Weber argues that the modern scholar is he who recognises that the value of truth cannot be
grounded and yet chooses to legislate this value for himself and to affirm its value as a matter of faith. (91)

There is much more to be said about Science as a Vocation and its continuing relevance. Here, though, the main point to make is this: what Weber shared with someone like Arnold was an awareness that the death of God changed utterly the location of cultural authority, practices of self formation, and the possibility of community. Where he differed was in not reinventing Culture and Literature (or, for Arnold, the State) as post-religious sources of authority and community. Rather, Weber grasped the nettle of meaninglessness, and attempted to articulate an academic vocation for the cultural scientist that constituted mature reflection on an inherently irrational present, a modernity in which the bonds of community and publicness were giving way to purely instrumental social relations. Hence Owen’s final judgement on Weber’s position:

modernity was simultaneously characterised by the constitution of individuals with the capacity for autonomy and the collapse of cultural grounds for realising that capacity (disenchantment), while also being increasingly characterised by institutional structures which facilitate the reduction of ideal to material interests. (216)

This shows why Weber remains important for any serious reflection on the future of cultural studies. Today’s supposedly “post-modern” crisis simply restates Weber’s questions. At the turn of the millennium, can the university, the humanities, or cultural studies make any plausible claim to articulate a practice of subject formation in relation to notions of authority grounded in Reason and/or Culture, and in the service of the creation of community?

Culture Wars and Ruination

Although Bill Readings does not refer to Weber, his argument in The University in Ruins contains many echoes of Science as a Vocation. The University of Reason and the University of Culture have given way, says Readings, to the University of Excellence. This is a Weberian story of disenchantment, instrumentalisation and bureaucratisation. “Excellence” is an entirely and necessarily vacuous concept, which signifies only that the centre of the university’s moral universe has shifted from its public responsibilities to its efficient administration. The university has thus become post-ideological. Gone forever is its power to constitute the authoritative culture of the nation-state, and gone too is its role in forming mature and autonomous citizen-subjects for that state. That is why the university is in ruins.

Hence cultural studies, argues Readings. Here, too, his attitude is Weberian. Readings asks how this particular practice of reflection on culture is itself a product of this new, post-ideological academic culture. The success of cultural studies in the United States, he argues, is symptomatic of a change in the social mission of the university, even if in a surprising and discomforting way:

That mission used to be the production of national subjects under the guise of research into and inculcation of culture, culture that has
been thought, since Humboldt, in terms inseparable from national identity. The strong idea of culture arises with the nation-state, and we now face its disappearance as the locus of social meaning. Once the notion of national identity loses its political relevance, the notion of culture becomes effectively unthinkable. The admission that there is nothing to be said about culture as such is evident in the institutional rise of Cultural Studies in the 1990s. [. . .] It seems to me that the idea of Cultural Studies arises at the point when the notion of culture ceases to mean anything vital for the University as a whole. The human sciences can do what they like with culture, can do Cultural Studies, because culture no longer matters as an idea for the institution. (89-90, 91)

This is a scandalous argument, to which I cannot do justice here. That would mean repeating and expanding Readings’s differentiation between the genealogy and logic of British cultural studies and US cultural studies, and extending them to the peculiarities of cultural studies in Australia and elsewhere. What I do want to consider, more broadly, is what Readings’s argument means for the nexus of questions which I have argued defines the space of cultural studies: subject formation, cultural authority, and community. The issue is whether, as the argument by Stefan Collini with which I began implies, cultural studies is simply the latest disciplinary (or quasi-disciplinary) formation to occupy that space. Readings’s argument about the “post-historical” university is more radical. It suggests that this space—the intellectual and public space of the modern university—has disappeared.

Take the question of subject formation. As an educational project, I hope it is neither inaccurate nor unfair to observe that cultural studies has had at its heart a commitment to a certain style of subject formation. As heir to the humanities (or as the cuckoo in the nest of the humanities, as some Ancients would say), cultural studies attempts to develop as far as possible all the student’s human potentialities—moral, ethical, aesthetic—through the critical reflection on cultural objects. The means to this end are techniques of skilled critical reading across a wide range of signifying or representational practices. What marks it off as both critical and humane is its distance from utilitarian and vocational forms of education: training people to be competent workers within the cultural and media industries.

On the logic of this dichotomy, I agree with Ian Hunter. It is entirely bogus. For a start, the ideology from which the post-ideological university has blessedly released us is the Kantian distinction between the critical and instrumental. “Critique” was never disinterested, but was always a means to the end of creating citizens with the right measure of maturity and autonomy for the effective operation of the modern nation-state. Admittedly, the route was an indirect one. The techniques of reflection and ethical comportments associated with the humanities (when they work) do not train students to be citizens as such: competent citizenship is a desired and predictable by-product of their training in the performances of critical and reflective scholarship. In the same way, teaching different professional and ethical comportments will train people to be (one hopes) critical and reflective journalists, film-makers, advertisers, marketing and public
relations executives, arts administrators, or whatever. Hunter insists that training in the humanities (or cultural studies) cannot be defended as the embodiment of the humanising mission of liberal education, because they are as practical and limited in their outcomes as any other form of university education: “Ends such as conscientiousness, civility, or the balanced sensibility are not justifications for or explanations of the disciplines of liberal education [because] the ethical intelligibility and pertinence of these goals is the result of a prior commitment to or induction into those very disciplines” (“Personality” 42). The outcomes of the humanities are another set of comportments, and just that. They offer a royal road neither to personal fulfilment nor to ethical superiority, nor to a privileged understanding of the human condition.

Readings assumes a similar modesty about the outcomes of either liberal or vocational practices. Once the idea of culture as a defining and guiding principle for the University has been lost, then no longer can it be assumed that either practice will produce mature and autonomous citizens. Again, my point is not to champion the claims of vocationalism over those of critique, but rather to insist that the opposition between the two, if it ever had any substance, is now a false one. It rests on a claim to the cultural authority which the Idealists derived from Kant’s distinction in The Conflict of the Faculties. Today, though, for many in cultural studies the authority which Kant vested in Reason is ascribed to the ordinarness of experience. A critical disposition is reduced to scepticism towards power and authority, not a submission to the disciplines of self-mistrust and reflection, or the rigours of a scientific vocation.

Experience thus ceases to be the object of critical scrutiny, and becomes itself the source of authority that had been invested in Reason and then in Culture. This is one of the things that enrages the post-modern Ancients in today’s battle of the books. Their beef is still that authority and tradition have been uncoupled, and they can see nothing but anarchy as the result. Before we in cultural studies respond with a whoopee! and “pass the authority,” however, we should listen again to Bill Readings. The stakes in our culture wars at the end of the millennium, whatever the parallels, have changed. It may not be that the rise of cultural studies indicates that we (well-meaning leftist liberal academics) have taken over the cultural authority that Bloom believes can only be vested in the traditions of Western civilisation. Readings’s conclusion, less cynical than Weberian, is that this authority has passed away from us (academics as a whole) altogether. We cultural studies Moderns may have won the battle, but only because the war has become a meaningless game played with wooden swords and hobby-horses.

Is the evaporation of the university’s cultural authority a cause only for despair? Readings offers a partially positive alternative. If cultural authority is no longer up for grabs, it is at least always in question. And that can be pretty liberating. No longer need we be condemned to the farcical re-enactment of centuries-old book battles and academic turf wars. Instead, the question of cultural authority becomes in part the question of disciplinarity, the question of how knowledge is discursively organised and transformed, and so a critical reflection on the academic, intellectual and discursive limits
within which we operate. What finally appears after Collini’s process of
disciplinary decomposition is over may be not a new set of disciplines, but
new styles of disciplinarity. For cultural studies, the question thus ceases to
be how to recover the lost authority of the humanities in order to legitimise
the formation of mature, critical subjects in a disenchanted era of ordinary
culture and excellent universities. Instead, authority ceases to reside in
either tradition or experience, but is seen to be (as it always really was)
iterative. Such reflection on the rationalities of the present then shades into
the question of the university as community, but in Nancy’s sceptical sense
rather than Williams’s identitarian sense:

The thought of community that abandons either expressive identity
or transactional consensus as means to unity seems to me to refer to
what the posthistorical University may be. The University is where
thought takes place beside thought, where thinking is a shared
process without identity or unity. Thought beside itself, perhaps.
The University’s ruins offer us an institution in which the
incomplete and interminable nature of the pedagogic relation can
remind us that “thinking together” is a dissensual process; it belongs
to dialogism rather than dialogue. (Readings 192)

For Readings, this means giving up on the social mission of the modern
university. After three centuries, it is time to let go of the supposed link
between the university and national identity which has provided academics
with a cultural alibi for their work. But, Readings also insists, it should not
mean giving up on social responsibility. Here his thinking again becomes
strikingly, if apparently unconsciously, Weberian:

Real responsibility, ethical probity, is simply not commensurate with
the grand narrative of nationalism that has up to now underpinned
accounts of the social action of University research and teaching.
The abandonment of that legitimating narrative is a frightening
prospect, but it seems to me that it is inevitable. (192)

Amen to that. But in saying amen, let me return once more to the project
of cultural studies that I identified in the early work of Raymond Williams,
and which leads me to raise two small questions about the story which
Readings tells so well.

The first concerns the temporality of his history. As I see it, the University
of Reason first becomes visible in Kant’s Conflict of the Faculties. This was
published in 1798. The embodiment of the University of Culture is
Humboldt, Schleiermacher, and Berlin. Humboldt’s program was published in
1810. So the transition from Reason to Culture takes not much longer, in
the Australian context, than the switch from Dawkins to Vanstone. Then,
however, there is a leap in Readings’s narrative to the emergence of the
University of Excellence some time in the 1980s or 1990s: a lacuna of 180
years which surely saw some changes in higher education and universities
that are worthy of note.

That links to the second point. Readings pays no attention to the
quantitative shifts that have been part of the transformation of universities.
His typology of Reason, Culture and Excellence offers a provocative and
much needed corrective to the conventional history of progress from elite
Can Cultural Studies Survive the Millennium?

to mass to universal higher education. But however problematic those terms undoubtedly are, they do also tell a certain truth. The huge increase in the number of people engaged in higher education, and the extension of its social reach, do mark an undeniable democratic advance, even if that advance has entailed many of the changes in the practices of universities that Readings regrets. In defence of Raymond Williams, he at least never forget to do his sums, and he always remained concerned with creating the institutional conditions for a democratic culture (even if he mistook that for a common culture) and an open, educated democracy. It seems to me that universal higher education would have to be one of the defining features of a democratic culture. A cultural studies which was not committed to achieving it, and adapting to it, could only be an educational project in dubious faith.

Let me then, talking as it were among friends of cultural studies, express a concern which may not do justice to most actually existing courses in cultural studies, but which is nonetheless based on observation and inference. My worry is that in their preferred pedagogies, in their loyalty to traditional forms of university organisation, and even in their instinctual support for traditional forms of student funding, many people committed to cultural studies as some kind of radical project often, and surprisingly, remain wedded to a gentlemanly ideal of university participation. By that, I mean the belief that students should be entitled to a period of three or four years of financially independent leisure in which to develop a critical, reflective personality through sustained reflection on culture. The blunt political question is this: is that ideal compatible with the democratisation of higher education? As I have said, that question is in part about numbers—who gets to take part in higher education? But it also involves what it is that those new cohorts want from education, how those demands should be met, and how both our performance as teachers and theirs as students should be judged. Accepting the consequences (and costs) of democratisation does not mean selling out to the vacuities of excellence. But it does require a leap of political imagination to break down in practice the conventional hierarchies between vocationalism, critical distance, and worldliness that Hunter and Readings reject on theoretical grounds.

Let me end by returning to Raymond Williams as he contemplated the millennium in 1983. He adopted a pragmatic attitude:

There is little point in any recall of the millenarian spirit, though if we renounce the terms of its positive expectations we ought also to renounce the terms of the most common negative expectations. There are discovered and discoverable reasons, of a fully objective kind, for intense concern about the future of industrial civilisation and, beyond even that, about the future of the species and of the planet, under destructive forces that are already loose. But there are also discovered and discoverable reasons for a kind of hope which has accepted the facts underlying these fears and which can see ways beyond them which are fully within our capacity. (Towards 2000 5)

Williams urges his readers to think creatively about the future in order to take part in making that future. In that spirit of pragmatic hope, I would say that the cultural studies which deserves to survive the millennium refers less to a content, or even to a pedagogy, than to an educational attitude.
This attitude does return to something like Williams's agenda, and sees the purpose of cultural studies as contributing to the creation of a democratic culture. In part, that means the attempt to calculate and imagine what a democratic culture would look like once the assimilationism of a common culture and the contingency of the claims of authority or identity have recognised and transcended. It also involves, in quite practical ways, training students to be professionally competent in the practices and institutions that constitute the fabric of a culture. It will be that type of mature and autonomous agency, rather more than the skilled and sceptical reading of cultural texts, that will determine whether and how our culture might be made democratic.
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“Discovering the New”: Demonstrating the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Ernesto Grassi

Joan Sheridan

Long ago Socrates asked the question, “How do we find that which we do not know?” 1 I wish to discuss this problem in the light of modern hermeneutic theory, using insights found in the work of H.G. Gadamer, and following the epistemology of the Italian philosopher Ernesto Grassi. I argue that in our search for knowledge and in our understanding of the new the emotive language of metaphor plays a vital role.

Traditionally emotion and metaphor were not considered to form the basis for “real” knowledge. They were considered to “mislead the passions” and cloud the judgement. The more acceptable approach, and the one usually followed today, claims that we know something when we are able to prove it. To prove means to show something to be, on the basis of something else. It involves a rational, logical, causal relationship; it has little to do with the subjectivity of emotion or the imagination of metaphor. The rational (from the Latin ratio, meaning “account, reckoning”) is apodictic, demonstrative speech and it establishes the definition of a phenomenon by tracing it back to ultimate principles or first causes.

The Greeks called the ultimate principles on which knowledge is grounded the archai. The validity of this rational process is limited to the principles on which it has laid its foundations. It is clear that the first archai of any proof and hence of knowledge cannot be proved themselves because they cannot be the object of apodictic, demonstrative logical speech, otherwise they would not be the first assertions.

But if the original assertions are not demonstrable, what is the character of the speech in which we express them? Obviously first principles cannot have a rational-theoretical character.

In the humanist tradition of Gadamer and Grassi, knowledge is primarily not a matter of abstract rationality, but a human construct, consisting of

1 “And how will you enquire Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of your enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?” (Plato, Meno 80b)
humankind’s tested ideas which reach back to the earliest times. Grassi claims that when we are confronted with human activity which is original and non-deducible, it cannot have a apodictic and demonstrative character and structure, but is completely indicative or imaginative. It is the indicative character of archai or first principles that makes demonstration possible at all.

At the beginning of the Western tradition, Heraclitus considered this problem and expressed the indicative nature of truth by referring to an interesting image. He wrote, “The prince who owns the oracle at Delphi does not explain nor hide; he indicates, shows” (Heraclitus no. 22, B 93). The sentence of Heraclitus refers to the pointing figure of the god Apollo above the temple of the Delphic oracle. The pointing figure of the god who loves truth above all is a visual representation of the indicative nature of that which is originary and non-deducible.

We now come to the question of how the indicative nature of that which is originary (archai) makes itself known to human understanding and how it is expressed.

Grassi claims that when we are confronted with the new or originary, it appears primarily as a sense of wonder. It is immediate, that is, unmediated. It points us to something else. It awakens in us the need to ask questions so that we may unveil the meaning of phenomena by freeing an “originary vision” of them. Both Aristotle and Plato relate the phenomenon of wonder to the origin of philosophy: “It is owing to the wonder that men both now begin, and at first began, to philosophize” (Aristotle, Metaphysics 982 b12). The appearance of the “new” acts upon our senses and is experienced as a feeling of wonder. Wonder manifests itself instantaneously and directly as a compelling force. Our response cannot be apodictic or “controlled.” Our response to the compelling demand of the new is a “passionate” response, from the Latin patior, passus, meaning “to suffer” or “to endure.” Humanity must “suffer” the demands of life. Our suffering involves the emotions (from the Latin e-movere, “to move”) so that we are often “moved” in unexpected ways.

Wonder, which Grassi claims is our first response to the appearance of the new, has a pathetic nature. Pathos, the emotion accompanying wonder, is the expression of our experience of being compelled to seek an explanation. Aristotle recognised the need to ask questions about that which attracts our attention. He uses the metaphor of a knot in our thinking to express our recognition of the unknown, and the need to untie the knot as the demand which forces its attention upon humanity and demands a response, so that we may go forward:

For those who wish to get clear of perplexities, it is a good plan to go into them thoroughly; for the subsequent certainty is a release from the previous perplexities, and release is impossible when we do not know the knot. The perplexity of the mind shows that there is a “knot” in the subject; for in its perplexity it is in much the same condition as men who are fettered: in both cases it is impossible to make any progress. (Metaphysics 99, 5a 27-37)
When we are confronted with the “new,” we recognise that there is a “knot” in our thinking. We recognise that our traditional way of thinking is not sufficient. We are bound, we cannot go forward, we cannot untie the knot about something which we do not know, but our wonderment awakens our interest in how to untie the knot. We are compelled to seek an explanation. Grassi expresses the experience in the following way:

We are dealing with a passionate experience linked to an originary reality, which compellingly asserts itself in and through its instruments, the sensory organs. It is therefore an indicative, not a demonstrative passion, and as such it is nondeducible and must be recognised as a force arising from the abyss [i.e., originary reality]. (Grassi, *Primordial* 12)

We are dealing with a passionate experience linked to an originary reality which compellingly imposes itself upon us. We receive it in and through our senses, we are forced to speak and question, we must find the meaningful word which expresses the impact of the new.

In literature, writers respond to this aporia with metaphor. When faced with the need to express the unknown, the imagination is brought into play, and imaginative connections are made between what is not known and what is known. Metaphor makes us see: it makes manifest the miracle, the admirable, the unfoundable, and therefore the un-fathomable in the “here” and “now” of our daily lives. Literature fills us with wonder as we are confronted again and again with the demands made on us by life. The writer creates the metaphors through which the urgent appeal of originary reality makes itself known in history.

Effective metaphor requires the author and the reader to have an insight into the similarity which appears in the different fields. Something which was previously hidden is discovered and made visible, showing the reader a common quality which is not rationally deducible. With the Humanists, Grassi recognises this inventive capacity (*ingenium*) which is able to make connections, often between quite disparate objects, and out of these connections something new appears:

*Ingenium* [inventive capacity] is able to grasp (*coligere*) the relationship between things in a concrete situation in order to determine their meaning. This capacity has an “inventive” character, since it attains an insight without merely bringing out what is present in the premises as reason does in a logical derivation. Ingenium reveals something “new” [*ingenio [. . .] ad res novas proclives*], something “unexpected” and “astonishing” by uncovering the “similar in the unsimilar,” i.e., what cannot be deduced rationally. (*Rhetoric* 91-92)

*Ingenium*, as the inventive element in metaphor required to uncover the “new,” is a quality not given to all who seek it. It may be argued that *ingenium* is the quality of the artist, the attribute which distinguishes “literature” from other writing.

Metaphoric language is “imagistic,” that is, it creates images, it relies upon imaginative strategies of argument. Since Aristotle, the epistemological role
of the imagination has been continually debated. The question which has occupied minds since Aristotle is whether the imagination is a genuinely creative faculty or merely a reproductive one—mimesis or presentation. In Kantian epistemology, the position of the imagination is understood as the place where sense perception and ideas meet to create the new. Knowledge of the "new" is thus a product of both sense impressions and reason, mediated through imagination which participates in both sides of the cognitive process and is accompanied by the cognitive self (Kant, Critique A. 124). Kant's position supports the Humanist understanding that imagination is a fundamental component in our search for knowledge and in our invention of the world.

I will now demonstrate the claim that metaphor has a central ontological function in the discovery of the "new," and have chosen Judith Wright's poem "Flame Tree in a Quarry" as a paradigm. The poem may be examined from two points of view. The first is concerned with how metaphor makes us see, maybe for the first time, something "new," something of which we were previously unaware. The second deals with the central poietological concern of bringing originary reality out of concealment into its "truth."

*Flame Tree in a Quarry*

From the broken bone of the hill
stripped and left for dead,
like a wrecked skull,
leaps out this bush of blood.  

Out of the torn earth's mouth
comes the old cry of praise.
Still is the song made flesh
though the singer dies—

flesh of the world's delight,
voice of the world's desire,
I drink you with my sight
and I am filled with fire.  

Out of the very wound
springs up this scarlet breath—
this fountain of hot joy,
this living ghost of death.  

(1949)

As I read the poem, its metaphors allow me to see the following images. First, I see a spectacular flame tree, in full bloom, leaping high like living flame from the torn and gaping mouth of a disused quarry. I see a once-living hill of the Australian landscape, stripped and abandoned, and left for dead, its bare surface white like the bleached bones of a dead skull.

The second image is of the poet as bystander, contemplating the flame tree and pondering on her role as muse.
In turn, the images fill me with wonder. The awakened sense of wonder has an emotional aspect, it stimulates an interest in what is of concern and drives the reader to seek an explanation. The metaphors become the object of questioning and argumentation and of the desire to find a convincing interpretation. Through an examination of the metaphors we have the opportunity of seeing and understanding an aspect of the Australian landscape which may not have been obvious before.

In the philosophy of Grassi, when metaphors stimulate a sense of wonder we are in touch with the realm of what is originary, the non-deducible. Grassi calls it the response to the call of being, which asserts itself in the here and now of existence. We seek to understand the appeal by bringing to the images understandings which we have already established as knowledge. This is the historical aspect of knowledge. These pre-understandings, or in Gadamer's terms "prejudgments," which we have formed in the past and accepted historically as knowledge, come from many traditional sources.

On a personal level I bring my own unique life experiences, which include a respect for the work of Judith Wright and a concern for the Australian landscape. My respect for Wright's work motivates me to attend to her argument. In ancient rhetoric this is the topos of the orator's integrity which argues that, for an orator to be convincing, he or she must be a person of integrity. Respecting Wright's work contributes to the persuasive impact of her metaphoric argumentation.

In our questioning and need for interpretation we may turn to the science of botany for understanding. *Brachychiton acerifolius* is a large tree growing to 30 metres high. It occurs in the coastal brush forests of New South Wales and Queensland. It is one of the very few deciduous native trees. The leaves are usually shed before the massed flowers appear in late spring or early summer, and a leafless tree in full flower can be a spectacular sight, visible from a great distance in the rainforest canopy. The small fleshy bell-shaped red flowers, of different sexes on the same tree, are very numerous on panicle-branches which are also scarlet, adding to the mass of colour. Understanding gained from the Aboriginal tradition contributes to our interpretation. The inner bark fibre was used for nets and ropes; the seeds were eaten (and have been roasted as a coffee substitute by white settlers); the tuberous roots of young plants is a food item in some regions (paraphrased from *The Australian Encyclopaedia* 1363-64).

Using these pre-understandings, we are in a better position to see the physical use and appearance of the flame tree. Because we see it more clearly it becomes more convincing.

Metaphor is indicative, it points to something else, it transfers meaning. If we are familiar with the Judeo-Christian tradition, we may recognise the use of Biblical metaphors which transfer meaning from a religious context to the here and now of the Australian landscape. In the opening lines the poet creates an image which joins the landscape to the central symbol of the Christian religion. "From the broken bone of the hill/ stripped and left for dead,/ like a wrecked skull [. . .]" is an image which links the quarry with the place of Christ's crucifixion: "And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull [. . .] And they crucified him"
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(Matt. 27:33-35). We see the quarry as a Golgotha, the site of Christ’s death. Out of this Golgotha leaps the “bush of blood.” Metaphor transfers the imagination so that, as we look at the flame tree it is possible to connect the image to the crucified Christ.

The flame tree can also be seen as “the burning bush” of Moses. “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). We now recognise the stripped land as the site of a sacrificial offering, the disused quarry as a sacred site. If these metaphors are convincing to us, we accept them as trustworthy and give them meaning. A new understanding emerges which may not have been there before.

The flame tree “leaps” out from the quarry. We see an image of leaping fire. This metaphor gains power when we know the story from Greek mythology in which subterranean fire was understood as the creative force in vegetation. Hephaestus, god of fire and especially of the smithy fire, worked his forge under Etna, whose volcanic eruptions were considered to be the result of his forging and the mountain a huge chimney. Hephaestus was a divine craftsman, who made Pandora, the first woman or humankind in general. In the poem, the flame tree leaping out of the disused quarry becomes a symbol for the creative life force buried in the earth. It is an image of new life and craftsmanship.

There are other metaphors in the poem which support the interpretation of the earth as the place of resurrection and new life. The image of a fountain is one such place. The fountain metaphor links the flame tree to the Biblical Psalms, where the godhead is called the fountain of life. The fountain of life is an imaginative image which has become an accepted way of understanding the source of creation. The “fountain of life” topos is used by Judith Wright, it directs our thinking, but instead of arguing in the traditional manner for a transcendent reality and a creator god, the image shows that the life-giving fountain emerges not from the godhead but from a disused quarry in the Australian landscape.

The flame tree as “scarlet breath” (line 13) is another metaphor which argues for a life-giving force available from within the earth. We traditionally associate “breath” with a transcendent creator: “And the Lord formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7), but the “scarlet breath” metaphor shows the flame tree as a life force originating out of an Australian quarry.

Let us bring all these historical pre-understandings together. Botany and Aboriginal tradition show the flame tree as spectacular and useful; Judeo/Christianity associates it with the crucified and resurrected Christ; Greek mythology creates it as the source of new life; other Biblical references transform the landscape into the place of creation and resurrection.

From these metaphors it is now possible to discover something “new,” something which we may not have recognised before. The poet uses a tradition which believes in the metaphysical and transfers these
understandings to the physical world: she uses Christian images to substantiate a humanist philosophy. Christ’s broken bone is the quarry and the flesh of Christ is the flame tree. We may now understand a disused quarry in the Australian landscape as sacred. It is an argument for immanence and not transcendence. Of course, other interpretations are possible. Each reader’s subjective interpretation must argue with other interpretations in an ongoing dialogue so that eventually a common understanding is reached. The result of the “common sense” (communis sensus) understanding of a community is knowledge, and this knowledge may then become the basis for praxis.

I will now consider the second aspect of Judith Wright’s imagery. The poetry not only argues for an aspect of Australia which may not have been considered before, but it also shows through images the ontological emergence of originary reality. It presents the sacred Australian land as the place from which originary Being emerges and the role of the poet as the “creator” the one who brings this reality into the open.

Looking at the flame tree “leaping” like fire out of the broken earth is a profound experience for the poet. She describes her experience with images taken from Biblical texts which go right to the heart of the Christian faith. An understanding of the poet’s experience requires a foreknowledge of these texts.

The “bush of blood,” “flesh of the world’s delight” (lines 4 and 9), which the poet “drinks with her sight” (line 11), may be interpreted as the sacrificial blood and body of Christ: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). Christians believe that by partaking of this holy feast, sins are forgiven and everlasting life assured. The metaphors show the poet as partaking of this feast not on a metaphysical level but at the table of the Australian earth. She is now “filled with fire,” ready to prophesy.

Being “filled with fire” as she looks at the flame tree is another metaphor which can be interpreted in the light of Biblical pre-understandings: “And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:3). Tongues as of fire symbolize God’s descending power at Pentecost, resulting in the ability to speak “divinely.” For the ancients, singing, poetry and wisdom were closely linked. Singing and poetry are traditionally linked through the ancient Greek idea of the Muse. The concept of the Muse, as a vital force in all higher forms of intellectual life, has been a consistent factor in the history of literature. Cicero claims that “to live with the Muses means to live with humanity and learning” (cum Muis, id est, cum humanitate et doctrina [Tusc. V, 23, 66]). The muses were reputed to know all things and were thus invoked by the poets to infuse their word with truth. The Muses, as the special favourites of the gods, and as intermediaries between these and men, gave to the poet his divine function. Virgil refers to the divinus poeta and Dante’s Commédia is commonly called “The Divine Comedy.” The poets were described by the ancients as “godlike men” and were held in the highest esteem. The topos of the Muse presented in the poem as the voice
of the poet shows the poet in the original sense of the word *poesis*, as the creator, the one who creates the images from which we uncover the originary reality.

As a response to the wonder of the originary call of reality, the poet has invented images. These images are interpreted and show a way of understanding our country which may not have been there before. If these interpretations are convincing, we can say that we have seen at least part of the truth.

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**Bibliography**


Bible. Authorised King James Version.


Performing Visual-Bodies

Susan Ballard

"So you do like it!" Cyb said provocatively.

You're in a strange place. Iris said to herself. Be civil. She took a sip from her drink.

"Well, yes, but it still affects my sense of who I am."

Her right side felt all sharp and twitched as she spoke. Cyb was waving her cursor.

"Remember, I am stuck in you now. We are working together, who you are is determined by your relations with me."

Iris realised that that was how things were going to be. She was always going to be getting stuck to others both organic and inorganic now that her skin had stretched, and her body's boundaries had become fuzzy.

Iris is experiencing the ambivalent joys of life alongside technologies. She recognises that her body no longer means the same as it did before Bell made that call through the "dead ear" of the soon-to-be telephone (see Ronell, esp. 287ff.). She has invested in the culture that is now around and a part of her. Iris has bought into technology. Iris and Cyb are cyborgs. Iris's circumstances remind me of Donna Haraway's question:

Why should our bodies end at the skin? (Haraway, "Cyborg" 178)

My desire for the cyborg's presence amongst us has passed. Cyborgs are already in our midst, with identification of their impact being a matter of finding evidence rather than proof. One apparent feature of the cyborg's illegitimate presence is our contemporary acceptance of continually mutating points of contact between bodies and machines. In addition, the simultaneous occurrence of a networking of perspectives is an accepted part of late twentieth-century consumer society. The body begins to resurface, expanded through a new repertory of interactions, no longer considered as merely an object. Stephen Zepke analyses this reconfiguration as the
change from the body being the "site of an application of an abstract model or prefabricated general idea" to the body as "a virtuality, a site of invention" (Zepke n. pag.). Even at the personal level, this present text is created by Haraway's dead hand of the cursor, guiding my body as I cut and paste. Body and text are placed as site of invention by the intervention of the cyborg.

This paper looks at the bodies that may circulate around the cyborg, particularly focusing on what I term "visual-bodies." I define visual-bodies as bodies of knowledge that are rendered through some form of art practice: they may be figurative, but they may also be remnants or traces of bodies once past, or forever absent. The cyborg has an impact on the construction of visual-bodies but it is my contention that the cyborg itself cannot be represented. Instead, we can view visual-bodies that reflect the passing presence of the cyborg. It is this sensation of image-as-event that I suggest as a method of viewing visual images concerned with the interface of technology and visual art practice at the turn of the millennium.

I am interested in exploring the sensations that the presence of visual-bodies invites in my own body, and seeing how their presences manifest in their relations to the technology behind which they may be hiding. As I have suggested, one model for discussing these relationships is the cyborg. An assemblage of technology and organic body, the cyborg is a hybrid term in itself: part cybernetic, part organism. The cyborg is an attempt to conceptualise our relations with others, such as those we may consider non-human, animal or machine, and gain a perspective on our own positioning in this equation. The visual body is a sign that the cyborg has already inscribed our bodies. Instead of offering a dream for the future, I question the contemporary realization of these hopeful monsters in the spaces of bodies and others.

Elspeth Probyn summarizes the "staple of cultural studies inquiry" as the question "how do individuals make sense of their lives?" (5). My project asks this question in a different way: how do we make sense of the connections between bodies and others? As I shall discuss, these bodies are not owned individuals—my body—not generalisations—the body—but in a Deleuzian sense they are "singularities," becoming-bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 149ff.). These "others" might be both organic and inorganic, surface and depth, virtual and real. Both body and other are situated amidst a milieu within which the above pairings are arranged not in binary oppositions but in new relational environments. My question, then, is how do we articulate these relationships and what does this process do to our bodily and conceptual frameworks?

In her book Outside Belongings, Elspeth Probyn discusses changing physical and psychical spaces: "living on the outside" (4). At one point Probyn

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1 Her actual phrase is "the dead hand guiding the living cursor on the video display unit" ("Gender" 128). Also this by Murray: "We take the mouse in hand and move freely between frames—clicking, dragging or simply locating objects on screen. This unfettered extension of ourselves reduces our body to something like an arrow or small hand, roughly one centimetre high—about the same dimension as an insect" (18).
discusses summer life in Montréal, where individuals live in proximity on outside balconies. She is interested in how the relations between different individuals are negotiated, and discusses how sometimes certain people/bodies may even become invisible. Her project explores the bodily relations determined in a close community. The proximity of the relations Probyn discusses parallels the relationship a viewer might have with a piece of visual art. This relationship produces a hybrid space negotiated between viewer, artwork and “visual body.”

This paper seeks to focus on a few of these intimate spaces, to see if in considering them we come up with “something more than the term identity can catch, a cohabitation that goes beyond the limited concept of tolerance” (Probyn, *Outside 5*). Identity as a term has been shown to be problematic. Often its individual motivations are limited to sameness or difference. The experience of cohabitation implies that our identity is formed by relationship and association, and that the term “identity” is not intrinsic or fixed. Instead of individualised identities, the space of the “visual body” produces a cohabitation of bodies and others: a cohabitation so close that one may be confused for the other, or one may become—other.

In a series of exhibitions held in 1997 at the Honeymoon Suite in Dunedin titled *Soft Cell*, the body appeared to have become all technology. All Cyb, and no Iris. *Soft Cell* focused on spaces of communication, offering technologies not as a fantastic “battle hymn of the virtual republic” (Wark, n. pag.) but proposing some subtle everyday stories. Inside *Soft Cell*, we became hybrids in a sprawling space mediated by technologies. We were linked within patterns of involvement with a variety of bodies, technologies and others. A waterfall of faxed information cascaded over ladders and sawhorses, as the exhibition continually mutated. Even the electricity was seen to escape the walls of the show. There were things hidden that entered the exhibitions from a distance. Voices and images travelled in and out of the room, collected by the internet, and replayed to new visitors (See figs 1
and 2). The spaces of *Soft Cell* were physically defined in such a way that
drew attention to the apparent absence of bodies. But bodies were present
on every surface.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Becoming is surface-orientated. A conceptual space where movement
between surfaces is desirable, an alternative to being bodies. A physical
space focused by the presence and movement of bodies. Bodies that do not
end at the skin. Probyn says that the question of where bodies end can be
characterised by “a yearning to make skin stretch beyond individual needs
and wants” (Probyn, *Outside 6*). I place alongside this yearning the cyborg.
The cyborg invites us to stretch while offering scary mutant becomings as
the results of our needs and wants. The cyborg as *problema* threads her way
through this story, both welcoming and distressing. To quote Derrida:

*Problema* can signify projection or protection, that which one poses
or throws in front of oneself, either as the projection of a project,
of a task to accomplish, or as the protection created by a substitute,
a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter,
or dissimulate ourselves, or so as to hide something unavowable
—like a shield. (12)

The cyborg waits impatiently, needy for connection and with a wish to
question previous formulations of the body. This figuration of the cyborg
facilitates changing bodily relationships whilst reminding me of some sense
of embodiment. My cyborg moves beneath me, reflects me, controls me.

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1 An untitled installation by Andrea Selwood involved careful painting of burn marks
above each of the electric plugs in the gallery spaces, with matching scorching on the
ceiling. *Tardis* by Warren Olds imported office equipment into the gallery, creating a
space where the viewer was made aware of a body recently absent, but then offered traces of
that body’s presence (see figs 3 and 4). Danny Butt’s installation *Audio Guides* involved
the hiring of a call-minder service from Telecom, on which audience members left
messages discussing the works. These were then relayed to the internet site and could be
replay as sound files.
Donna Haraway said of her cyborg: “Our bodies, ourselves; bodies are maps of power and identity. Cyborgs are no exception” (“Cyborg” 180).

This cyborg moves the body out of its relationship with the mind and into another paradigm. The mapping of both power and identity blur into a site of negotiated relatedness. This “new body” is not a mechanistic piece of clockwork, it is not a disposable, escapable body such as Descartes dreamed of. It is a substitute, a relieving teacher displacing what I might actually be thinking about. I have thrown it in front of myself. Questioning and pushing my own boundaries, it makes me say and do things that I am not sure about, it forces me into ambiguity.

Inside this ambiguous space, negotiated bodies mingle. The cyborg is a possible tool for viewing from within this integrated circuit, from this historical moment. The integrated circuit is defined by Haraway as a world networked through communications technologies, moving at high speed, travelling huge distances, whilst organic bodies sit watching through a screen. It is about vision, about experiencing through our eyes. It is telling a visual tale.

But communications technologies are not just screens, it is not only our eyes that are changing what they see. The body is learning new experiences as well. As Donna Haraway has said,

> Intense pleasure in skill in machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but an aspect of embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. (“Cyborg” 180)

A level of responsibility must also be accorded the playful figure of the cyborg. The cyborg is teasing me. Lurking at edges it too must take some responsibility for this change in control and appearance of the body. Cyborg bodies do not end at the skin. They are the public face of embodied selves living in a network of partial relationships with other bodies, animals and machines. To conceptualise this, it may be necessary to focus the fuzzy edges and concentrate on what is happening in these antagonistic spaces.

To return to Haraway: bodies yearn for pleasure. An aspect of their embodied nature is that they desire. In addition, according to Haraway, bodies particularly gain pleasure from technology. But Haraway would not approve of my slipping between desire and pleasure in this way. Haraway’s utopic dreams are focused on the surface, and are not interested in predefined psychical motivations. She would argue that a term such as desire does not allow for the implosion of subjects and objects as heralded by the cyborg (Haraway, Modest 42-3).

Foucault would also comment that desire is problematic, considering desire’s history associated with imposed meanings. According to Foucault, desire always implies a “lack,” it is usually utilised in a negative way and has a history of signified investment. In place of desire, Foucault proposed “pleasure” as a useful formulation. Pleasure, to Foucault, is “virgin territory, unused, almost devoid of meaning. There is no ‘pathology’ of pleasure, no ‘abnormal’ pleasure” (qtd. in Probyn, Outside 47). Deleuze, in debate with Foucault, resisted Foucault’s push for pleasure and held onto the
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term “desire” whilst actively working to redefine its motivations (See, for example, Foucault and Deleuze 9-16). Deleuze talks of engagements of desire as lines of flight that are made across bodies defined by “zones of intensity, thresholds, gradients and flux” (Deleuze and Guattari 157-58). Desire, for Deleuze, becomes a connective force across and between bodies. Perhaps then, somewhere between Deleuze and Foucault, it is possible to imagine that we can return to the term “desire” precisely because in different ways they have both “rid [desire] of naturalised connotations and pathologizing motives” (Probyn, Outside 47). Following Probyn, then, I use this discussion as an argument that is “not against psychoanalysis but rather for another use of desire” (Outside 47). I want to utilise this partially redeemed word “desire” because it invites connectivity. Desire is a push outwards, whereas pleasure seems to hold connotations of interiority, being less about connections than sensations. Desire, to me, is both relational and sensate.

So allow me to place this new desire alongside the body of the cyborg. The cyborg sits as threshold to this desire. Both cyborg-body and desire now concentrate on connecting and engaging with others. Neither desire nor cyborg is motivated by a particular object of attainment but both are engaged in the process of becoming-pleasure. With no object in mind, the body performs the becoming-pleasure of the cyborg. An instance:

The room where I keep my computer is white. A friend told me that it made her think of death, and, in a way, she’s right. I feel like I shed something when I enter this room. It’s almost as if I leave me behind. In front of my computer I am equal to everyone else. This is when my mind roams free and I soar out of my body above the world. Occasionally the text in front of me drops out of focus and I see my face staring out from behind the screen. As if a mirage of myself has entered the monitor. Sometimes I wonder if that face is still in there when I walk away. But no, I’m being silly, it’s a reflection. I focus on the text again. (Fenton 4)

Leeann Fenton’s text performs the becoming-pleasure of the cyborg, until rationality seeps into the room and the cyborg hides in a reflection. Relations between body and machine, fiction and reality are not only confused, they are changed.

Haraway’s cyborg figuration is only indirectly about human/machine collapse. As I have already hinted, the other thrust of it is the cyborg as a totally fantastic, fictional, quasi-real boundary creature. The cyborg dwells at cultural boundaries, intellectual boundaries, ontological boundaries. Considering this gives us the sense in which we’re all cyborgs, in that we all have to negotiate our parts, our own external and internal boundaries.

Sandy Stone has said:

we have to continually learn to live on the borders in order to be the creatures that we are, and we find sometimes that when we’re dealing with other people, there are chunks of us that are stuck in them. And when we look at our own road maps, there are chunks of them that are stuck in us, and that’s part of being a cyborg. It’s not just machinery, it’s that other people are collapsing into us, they’re
already there, we’re already, in a sense, collapsed into each other. In cultural terms, intellectual terms—those divisions that used to operate, don’t operate anymore. We’re all engaged in a very serious, very dangerous, but also very challenging and productive way of negotiating that aspect of cyborgism all the time, and it’s important to pay attention to it. (Stone)

Stone’s words are about movement across space and boundaries. Bodies are connecting with a multitude of others, organic and inorganic. Instead of working within a subject-object relationship, body and other are becoming indistinguishable. The skin is stretching. What might these stretched bodies look like?

To follow Deleuze and Spinoza, we must ask “not what the body is, but what it can do” (Deleuze and Guattari 256). The body can travel huge distances, it can leave messages to be stored and heard the next day. Visually, it is always mediated. Bodies matter because bodies desire. Their desires float in and around the walls of galleries. Why, then, is this body not figuratively represented on the walls? These cyborg bodies are not reducible, we cannot pinpoint a boundary. It is in this sense that the cyborg-body cannot be represented. And finally I come to the title of this paper “Performing Visual-Bodies.” My contention is that we cannot represent the cyborg because she is performative (on the performativity of gender which is the source for this idea, see Butler, Bodies).

Deleuze and Guattari say of representation, “Representations are bodies too!” (86). They suggest that we form maps, in the way that “the orchid forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome” (12). The orchid does not reproduce or represent the wasp. Deleuze and Guattari continue, “the map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence’” (12-13). This competence implies that there was something to copy, that someone copied, that the reproduction is secondary to the original. This of course implies an original of some form. As we have already seen, the cyborg does not claim an original identity, because it is situated on the borders. Because it is a negotiated becoming, the cyborg-body cannot be represented. But it is through the cyborg-body that we can reconceptualise the art work as a visual-body. The simulacrum. The copy without the original, but also with no need for the original.

Thus, the artwork, as well as interactions with it, are visual-bodies conceived along the lines of Butler’s performative body, a body that is not one single “act” but part of the “reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, Bodies 2).

Tardis by Warren Olds (figs 3 and 4) performs the visual-body by its apparent absence. Stored away inside the technology, the bodies in Tardis are not silenced by the technology but creep out of its corners. Their presence is not the lingering smudge of a body, but the expression of the moment of meeting itself. Tardis condenses time so that the absence of a body, perhaps sitting at the desk, is placed by the traces of that body that remain. This body becomes known through its involvement with technology. The focus then becomes the viewer’s engagement with the technology. Is the cyborg about to return and find us looking around? Tardis
does not reproduce the cyborg, but explores the desiring hybrid of human and machine as a new corporeality.

In this method of looking, we view the image, body or visual-body “not only as a signifier, but rather as an event” (Druckrey 25). We maintain a link to perception, but the idea of image-as-event foregrounds the experiential aspect of the visual-body. Timothy Druckrey suggests one possibility of image-as-event: “suddenly one might imagine the navigation of the image as more than the scrutiny of its signifiers, as a dynamic process in which the contingent stability of the moment itself is extended” (25; see also Weibel). As Butler tells us, performance “suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Gender 139). It is through performing the cyborg in the form of the visual body, that the moment of encounter or the image-as-event can be experienced.

This approach to image is used by Patricia Piccinini. Piccinini’s Mutant Genome Project and its offspring the LUMP (Lifeform with Unevolved Mutant Properties, 1995) allow the viewer physically to create the visual-body (fig. 5). Manipulating desires and appearances, the surface of the LUMP can be modified by adjustments in the LUMP’s interface with viewer and technology. Like its ancestor the mutant monster Frankenstein, the LUMP is beloved within its home environment. The LUMP is imagined perfection, but unable to escape the confines of its screen incubator. Its inscription through the cyborg is a fleeting image-as-event.

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1 Weibel identifies two formative events in the nineteenth century. First, the change in the idea of the image. With the advent of photography the image escaped to a variety of host media; “Image and vision dichotomised.” According to Weibel, the result of this was the birth of the visual. Second, the separation of the body and the message through the telephone. Previously the message came by horse, pigeon, ship, etc.; the telephone meant that “strings of signs could travel without a body.” “The concept of the visual radically changed with the technological transformation of the image, the image apparatus, and apparative perception” (340).
This inscription is one of rendering a surface (albeit an ephemeral one) into an otherwise apparent absence, highlighting “the processes by which things become visible and are produced on the outside” (Probyn 12). The surface is more than the skin. Thus, the skin stretched is not the end of the surface, it is the plane on which we negotiate our relatedness. As Probyn reminds us, by conducting ourselves on the surface we are required to “constantely place ourselves within relations of proximity [...] And at the edge of ourselves we mutate, we become other” (34). I inscribe the apparent absence of the cyborg, by giving it a surface, an edge between technology and organism, and in the images accompanying this discussion visual-bodies have appeared fleetingly in corners. The cyborg has returned to my argument. Pushing me to become other, to lend a different voice to the story. Informed by the possibilities of the cyborg I look to surfaces that tell me about connectivity. I experience my own relations with these images, not as a subject viewing, but as a pleased participant looking from this historical moment, creating ripples on the surface.

Cyb had been working with Iris for some time now. They were out at yet another gallery opening, their first together. Iris was a little uncomfortable, worried that she may look different to her friends. Cyb reassured her,

“You know if you play with my surfaces for a while, if you forget your positioning on the outside, you may see more than you expect.”

Iris turned and looked around the gallery. Suddenly the room was full of strange mutant beings, her friends, the artworks, the technology was moving inside a giant web. Her edges were turning into connections, the spaces between the images on the wall were bulging. Cyb was weaving around everywhere, piecing surfaces together.

Iris understood that this was a mobilisation of her perceptions, not a trap. It was a way of looking that was interrupted by her own examples, by connections and reconnections. She no longer resisted the performance, and followed Cyb into the next room . . .

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. *Soft Cell* Gallery installation. 1997. Workstation, ergonomic chair and computer terminal. Honeymoon Suite, Dunedin.


Fig. 3. Warren Olds. *Tardis* 1997. Office furniture, telephone, computer disks and white fun fur. Honeymoon Suite, Dunedin.

Fig. 4. Warren Olds. *Tardis* 1997. detail.

Fig. 5. Patricia Piccinini *Lump with the Lot* (detail) 1995. Screen grab.
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“Viral” Reading: VNS Matrix and the Leaky Body in Cyberspace

Sally Cloake

The Cartesian model of subjectivity still pervades our cultural psyche, despite poststructuralist claims that unified subjectivity is both a myth and exclusionary. Cixous, following Derrida, has shown that Woman is equated with the body in a hierarchically structured set of binaries (“From ‘Sorties’”). She is then denigrated or elided, while Man is equated with a mind that is supposedly capable of transcending the leaky, messy, uncontrollable body. Susan Bordo has charted the Western philosophical separation of mind and body, and says that, although conceptions of the body have differed historically, what they have in common is, to quote Bordo, the “construction of the body as something apart from [and undermining] the true self” (5). This “true self” may be termed the mind, soul, spirit, will, reason, consciousness: that which is the locus of subjectivity, and is best and noblest.

Women are disadvantaged by this sort of thinking because they are defined, along with the body, as that which is not best and noblest, is without reason, and in fact without a subject position. Hence, it is in women’s best interests to reject this dichotomous model of subjectivity, and constantly to re-invent new models, as I am doing with my viral trope. Likewise, part of Irigaray’s project is to propose mucus as a model with which to understand feminine subjectivity. Mucus, she writes, is the very threshold necessary for the erection of the solid masculine subject (109). In other words, the idea of Man as unified subject is dependent on a notion of Woman as his Other. However, Man forgets his dependence on Woman, does not want to be reminded of the unrepresentable, the undecidable, which is the mucus. Mucus is interior, hidden away from the penetrating male gaze. It is therefore a concept more suited to touch—a sense, as some feminists are quick to point out, often neglected in our scopophilic and body-phobic history.

To those yearning for and mourning the illusory unified subject and its accompanying rigid bodily boundaries, the feminine may appear monstrous, threatening. That feminine body must be controlled, normalised, quarantined, and its borders fortified, to avoid a rampant outbreak of the feminine (God forbid!). Susan Bordo notes, “Cellulite management, like liposuction, has nothing to do with weight loss, and everything to do with the quest for bodily margins” (191). Women’s boundaries are often elastic,
as in pregnancy. The line between a woman’s inside and her outside is difficult for the descendants of Descartes to conceive. This line, this lining of the mucous membranes signifies, according to Irigaray, the unthought, the unrepresentable (109). Mucus, she says, is not stable, it expands, and has no fixed form. Mucus is neither fluid nor solid, and in this sense, is undecidable. This undecidability can disrupt phallocentric smugness about notions of unity and stability.

Mucus corresponds to both sexuality and speech through the two sets of lips that, as Irigaray says, are not just vertical—as with the phallus—but horizontal as well; in other words, not just concerned with the one, the upright, the true, the norm, but also with a horizon of possibility (This Sex 213). Sometimes lying dormant in the mucous membranes of these two sets of lips is the self-replicating virus. I have extended, or “infected,” the mucous trope with the viral trope because I feel they are interrelated, and that mucus needs a further dimension to cope with the technological axis that has become a constitutive part of our subjectivity. Viruses exist in the mucous membranes of the body and can cause (as with the common cold) an overproduction of mucus: an excess of the feminine that can swamp the phallocentric body politic. Naturally, such an excess of the Woman-Other is feared by the Self, that son of Descartes who sees what he thinks is the healthy flesh of phallocentric structures being transformed into the horror of liquid and pus.

The complexities of the virus can be seen in our most discursively prominent virus, HIV/AIDS. Paula Treichler’s article “AIDS, Identity, and the Politics of Gender” recognises the destabilising potential of the virus: “within ideas of fixed biological difference is not only a conviction that AIDS is uniquely homosexual but that it represents a boundary transgression, a violation of natural difference” (132). This is the boundary transgression of the mucous/viral trope which has no respect for such arbitrarily constructed categories of race, gender, class, and sexual preference. Foucault has shown us in Discipline and Punish that the response to viruses is quarantine, and that this is an effective form of social control, with its strict regulation of the boundaries between self and other. In the case of AIDS, patriarchal culture responds to the threat of boundary transgression by constructing a discourse around AIDS that fuels a conservative agenda for women—monogamy, family and heterosexuality (Treichler 139). Thus the subversive potential of the virus is in a constant state of tension with the normative structures of social control—a continual border war between contagion and quarantine.

The productive capacity of the viral/mucous trope for my subversive project lies in its undecidable status. It is permeable and fluid, a shapeshifting, trickster figure, constantly mutating. Vaccines for influenza, for instance, are generally six months behind the virus’s latest mutation. It therefore is always a step ahead of those trying to control it. But in my view, the most important aspect of the virus is its implications for self/other relations. The virus works not simply by living off its host as a parasite, but by changing part of its host into itself. In other words, the virus reproduces by injecting its genetic material—its code—into the host cell, “seizing control of the reproductive mechanism” (Bukatman 76). The virus (the “other”) mimics
the self (the unified host) in order to reproduce itself. Thus the virus works by imitation. This imitation recalls the strategy of mimesis that Irigaray suggests women must adopt because there is no language, or code, of their/our own (This Sex '76).

The virus has no respect for its host, acting for its own survival, as if the host were there only for the survival of the virus—much as many humans feel about our planet and all its various organic and inorganic forms. Thus the virus may serve to remind us of our being-in-the world and not apart from it. Viral configurations highlight a network model, such as the Actor Network Theory, as described by Donna Haraway (“Promises”), in which actors and actants have a dynamic relationship, instead of a one-way subject-and-object relationship. Haraway argues that non-humans are not necessarily actors in the human sense but are, rather, part of the functional collective that makes up an actant. In this sense, the virus is an actant, neither subject nor object. There is even debate over whether it is actually a living organism. Strictly speaking, it is not, because it cannot reproduce on its own, and thus cannot claim agency in the conventional sense. But it is clear that the virus has an effect on its host, and is therefore not a passive organism either. The virus thus renders the binary structure of passive/active false. I agree with Haraway, who argues for a social relationality in which both actants and actors are integral partners. This provides a way out from what she describes as the “methodological individualism inherent in concentrating constantly on who the agents and actors are in the sense of liberal theories of agency” (“Promises” 331, note 11).

The actant virus is a productive model for feminist subjectivity. Like the virus, a woman can be neither subject nor object; conversely, she can be both subject and object. She experiences herself as a body that has been inscribed and shaped by external social forces. However, it is not a simple one-way dynamic. According to Cixous there are still various possibilities for some form of agency: potential choices that are available to her (Reader 135). On this point Judith Butler agrees, arguing that discourse and culture constitute subjectivity, but do not necessarily determine agency or the specific way a person will act (qtd. in Benhabib 82). Thus, women’s agency can be seen as similar to the virus, which, although not an actor, has observable effects on its host.

The inorganic, or computer, virus shares many of the attributes of the organic virus. Both may be thought of as pieces of code: either genetic or digital. Both bodily and computer viruses self-replicate, and both cause fear and anxiety. A computer virus may cause anything from a harmless “tag”—the name of the virus’s author appearing—to the complete wiping of the hard drive. Either way, the computer virus causes fear beyond rationality, and threatens the smooth functioning of the unified subject and the twin rational projects within our phallocentric culture that are the fathers of the internet—academia and the US military.

There are many women working as viruses on the Internet. These technomedia practitioners are replicating within this medium of testosterone ideology: spreading, mutating, leaking. Working together in a decentralised medium that can bridge geographical remoteness and is accessible to all who

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can afford it, women perched on the cutting edge of the new millennium can now exploit this medium to express their creativity and political positions.

One such feminist collective is VNS Matrix, comprised of four Australian women who, as the e-zine *Geekgirl* points out, "believe that women who hijack the tools of domination and control introduce a rupture into a highly systematised culture by infecting the machines with radical thought, diverting them from their inherent purpose of linear topdown mastery." The language here of political intervention is the language of illness, virus, infection, making the body a site of feminist political contestations. VNS Matrix situate the reader in the gendered body by structuring their digital text *CorpusfantasticaMOO* as a body, making explicit the connections between corporeality and their brand of feminist theory.

*CorpusfantasticaMOO* is a variation of the Multiple User Domains (or MUDs) based on the *Dungeons and Dragons* games. VNS Matrix have elbowed in on and virally infected this traditional male space. *CorpusfantasticaMOO*, however, although playful, has more to say than simply being a game. It is a "place" (a gendered female body) where virtual bodies wander and interact. Although *Corpusfantastica* consists of words on a screen, the reader is never allowed to forget the body—how can we, with character names like "MindFlux," "Crusty Candy" and "Psibapussy"?!

*Corpusfantastica* unambiguously grounds cyberspace in the marked female body in an attempt to counteract the disembodying tendencies of certain discourses surrounding cyberspace, for example, the cyberpunk movement, as well as masculine culture in general. The freedom from the real life body (or "meat") touted by some cybertheorists and cyberpunk writers is a fallacy, according to Nigel Clark. "Cyberspace," he says, "will demand a constant attentiveness to the flesh that comes with the capacity to retune the body's signifying surfaces from one moment to the next" (127). Anne Balsamo agrees, pointing to the monitoring and self-surveillance necessary to keep technobodies healthy (216), such as fat-, cholesterol- and calorie-counting. Cyberspace does not mean necessarily leaving the body behind. On the contrary, it is about constructing a different type of body, a cyborgian melding of technology, language and flesh into a new viral identity.

The language of *Corpusfantastica* is unendingly corporeal. Character names, the dialogue, the settings consist of internal bodily organs and functions. In particular, there are continual references to fluids and female reproductive organs—blood, milk, clots in the "Wandering Womb Matrix," and lots and lots of slime: all the dirt, disease and contamination associated with the viral feminine. But to many women, these sorts of explicit references, like mucous and viral tropes, conjure a feeling of being within the body, of the "corporeal knowledge" of which Zoe Sofoulis speaks. It therefore gives a sense of bodily perception: of touching and being touched—the two lips which Irigaray posits as a different and embodied realm from our well-documented scopophilic masculine imaginary. This sense of embodiment is represented by the interiority of mucus, which, writes Irigaray, sets up the "intimacy of bodily perception and its threshold for women" (109). Thus, by submerging and saturating the reader in the interiority of mucus and
femininity, VNS Matrix give us a virus-eye view of subjectivity in the lived female body.

*Corpusfantastica*, this realm of the gendered body, is a post-structuralist space, informed by feminist theories that work to propose a model other than the Cartesian one. As the introduction says, "It is darkly seductive here, and you could choose to slide through the cartesian reality grid and enter the spaciousness of the CorpusFantastica." That is, viral space—that which is unpredictable and fluid—replaces traditional notions of space. Quoting Irigaray with an implicit critique of phallocentric notions of time and space as linear and stable, VNS Matrix describe *Corpusfantastica* as "Seemingly infinite and infinitely small, neither here nor there." Then, phrases such as "with half remembered snatches of your life or is it?" remind us of the instability of memory and unified subjectivity. The "or is it?" leaves a question mark hanging over the ownership of one's life and memories, which are only ever incomplete fictions anyway.

Conversations in *CorpusFantastica* are radical, witty and unabashedly feminist. The tone is gossipy, bitchy, intimate, deriding men at their most prized and vulnerable point, like a virus which strikes when the immune system is lowest. In the Lung Lounge, for example:

sociopathic cyberslut says “There’s been a lot of flaming on the Net about the contents of Circuit Boy’s sizeable tool. They say it packs a digi but it keeps crashing. Not enough RAM where it counts […].”

Here there is a deliberate conflation of the penis and the phallus, as if in agreement with Jane Gallop’s point that differentiating between the penis and the phallus is pointless and fallacious, and exemplifies the mind/body split. She says, “the phallus is disembodied and rendered transcendent. The disembodied phallus is the linchpin of the move that raises maleness, a bodily attribute, to the realm of the spirit, leaving femaleness mired in inert flesh” (7-8). Viral processes forcibly remind one of the flesh. For instance, in the phrase, “not enough RAM where it counts,” VNS Matrix bring the glory of the hard, straight and true phallus—the big prick—back to its little, flaccid, gristly bodily roots.

Not only are Cartesian notions of unified subjectivity rejected in *Corpusfantastica*, but also the hopelessness and lack of agency attributed to some postmodern theorists. Instead, political strategies of partial and open identities are reiterated. This is summarized towards the end:

many feminists are attracted to a more tactical utopianism, a micropolitics of subversion, and to information age metaphors of transformation through viral processes, negotiations across the leaky boundaries and interfaces that do not entirely separate self from other, human from machine, host from parasite.

Here, a transformation is occurring. The leaky boundaries denigrated as feminine and the virus, long perceived with fear, loathing and disgust, are being appropriated by feminism to sculpt a new model for understanding subjectivity, in an effort to make cyberspace and, more generally, the society we live in more equitable. Scott Bukatman identifies a “terminal identity”: “an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the
end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station
or television screen" (9). I see this as a positive for women: the end of the
subject can only be the end of also the white, heterosexual male subject as
norm. If there are now no unified subjects, then women can potentially
adopt the new subjectivity that Bukatman (201) borrowing from Baudrillard,
has referred to as "a terminal of multiple networks." Haraway also argues
that the death of the subject is less a reason to mourn than one to celebrate.
She says it constitutes the "opening of non-isomorphic subjects, agents, and
territories of stories unimaginable from the vantage point of the cyclopean,
self-satiated eye of the master subject" ("Manifesto" 192). Perhaps out of
the Cartesian points that are the pixels of our terminals, we can construct a
non-linear, non-Cartesian, non-phallocentric model favourable to women.
My hopes are optimistic, my expectations are, sadly, more realistic . . . .

In our information era of late capitalism, new subjectivities are needed to
properly read cyberspace and our wider culture. I offer the virus as a
metaphor for feminist subjectivity. Of course, cyberspace and my virus
configuration are not in themselves empowering or transgressive. Rather,
some transgression of phallocentric structures may be achieved through an
interface between women and technology in a politically informed way. As
VNS Matrix say, "Our memory is your salvation . . . Your hardware is
redundant . . . corroded by slime." Perched on the threshold of the next
millennium, I am hoping that women on the Internet will replicate by
infecting phallocentric host structures with their/our own informational
code, diluting oppression with our slime, our mucus, our pus.

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The Body in a Space and the Space of a Body: A Critical Look at Progress in the Next Millennium

Chika Anyanwu

Definition
From the various literatures on the millennium or millenarianism, one can regard millennial discourse almost as anachronistic or even as an enigma. It transcends and yet fits into almost every discipline from eschatology to technology, anthropology to philosophy, sociology to psychology, and from economics to politics. I would define millennial discourse as a study of human forms over time and space. In situating my argument within this spatio-temporal discourse, my interest is in identifying the position of the body in the application of time and space in defining the next millennium.

Premise
This paper argues that the concept of “progress” in the new millennium is either as real as the Land of Oz or that real “progress” is misapplied in technological determinism. If the latter is the case, then millennial progress (adjudged by technological and economic growth) is a Eurocentric marginalising ideology constructed to create an artificial competitiveness, which defines its position in a binary economic divide.

Whether as fool, fraud, saint, respectable bourgeois, farmer or tycoon, the pain of the millennium belongs only to man. It is why he is man [. . .] the millennium points to a condition of being in which humans become free-movers, in which there are no obligations, in which all earthly desires are satisfied and therefore expunged. A new earth merges into the new heaven [. . .]. (Burridge 3-8)

Background Discourse
This above epigraph from the millenarian study by Burridge seems to be a perfect opening to a topic very ancient and yet too new to categorise. The euphoria surrounding the new millennium has come to signify many things to many people, countries and governments. It has almost become the unifying system of a disparate universe. The new millennium could
therefore be defined as a global target practice, a period of anxiety and expectation, a time of introspection and absolution. It can be called the
religion of the new age, when the new John the Baptist announces from the
Mir space station to McLuhan’s flower children of the global village, saying,
Prepare ye a way for the millennium, make straight its fibre-optic path.
Every home shall be linked (leaked?). Every mountain (alien cultures?) shall
be levelled (marginalised?). Such a messianic voice (threat?) has echoed, and
triggered immediate house-keeping strategies. Different countries with their
economic potential have come to associate the new millennium with the era
of change. Accordingly, a less developed nation like Malaysia targets the
year 2020. In whatever form it operates, the millennium has become a
homogenising force, even though its operation represents incongruous
ideological positions.

The hype and euphoria of cyber technology and the information
superhighway revolution have created anxiety delirium about the new
millennium. A typical case in point is the millennial bug known as Y2K.
The anxiety over the possible effects of Y2K has not only created a
technophobic millennial syndrome but has also equated the new millennium
with the quintessence of modern technological development. The epitome
of such technological development seems to be the cyberspace technology
with its Internet and virtual communities. On the other hand, the Internet
has “created a crisis of boundaries between the real and the virtual, between
time zones and spaces, near and distant. Above all, boundaries between
bodies and technologies, between our sense of self and our sense of our
changing roles” (Shields 7). Membership and participation of this
community is geared towards a universal audience, but in practice only those
who can understand its language (the computer literate) can function
effectively. It aims at an absolute equality of inhabitants, with no
censorship of any kind. As a world within a world, it is bound to define its
territorial limitations or face a conflict of power with the physical universe
of its origin. Unfortunately, this territorial definition has failed to
materialise. Instead, there is the danger that “Power, after investing itself
in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body”
(Foucault 56). Cyberspace is imposing its powers on the body that nurtured
its existence. Our belief system can be seen to be in line with Chris Jenks’
idea of social enculturation: human society passes through three stages, “the
age of God, the age of Heroes and the age of Men” (Jenks 14). We should
now add the fourth stage, which is the age of Technology. The
contemporary cyberspace is the fourth level of human evolution. According
to Edward Said, “a great talent has a great respect for its predecessor” (Said
59); cybertechnology therefore aims at complementing the inadequacies of
the past. As Berger says, “what biology does not provide must be
compensated for through non-biological means” (Berger, qtd. in Wuthnow et
al. 24). It may be the case that technology has answers to some of the
prevailing problems of modern society, but it may also be the case that
technology created most of the problems it is trying to solve. The major
concern is that when technotopia becomes the dominant readership of
global dynamic discourse such as the millennium, then only those with
technological powers will be making decisions for the rest of the inhabitants
of the world.

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It is evident that human machine synthesis cannot be retraced (Springer 19-23). It has become a part of modern civilisation. The danger according to Woolley is that the perfection of the artificial over the natural leads to a neglect of the original (Woolley 2). Such a society finds it difficult to distinguish between reality and artifice. The new millennium has come to signify technological progress. This technotopia controlled by the two Bills of America (Clinton and Gates) has changed our concept of the social sphere. It has created complexities with socio-political ramifications. Jon Katz calls it the digital nation. It is a society of informatic digitisation. "Can we construct a more civil society with our powerful technology? Are we extending the evolution of freedom among human beings? Or are we nothing more than a great wired babble pissing into the digital wind?" (Katz 49). The globalising (imperialising) forces of technology have become the measure of progress and development. Under the aegis of a McLuhanesque global village, technotopia has renamed sovereign exploitation, technological globalism. The undefined criteria, however, are the qualifications for membership in the networked public: control and equity of the new technological globalism. By a simple evaluation of the GDP of the constituting global membership of this new technological community, it becomes clear who owns and who is owned in the global economic discourse. Similarly, the industrialisation potentials of these economic giants further place them on the pedestal of leadership in the new millennium. Therefore, when we are discussing the new millennium, we are indirectly discussing a more user-friendly terminology for colonisation in the next millennium. In this regard, this paper aims at constructing an alternative perspective to progress through which some of the technologically disenfranchised people (such as Africans and the rest of the Third World) can represent their views in the new millennium. Since progress is hardly homogeneous, it would be contradictory to create a homogeneous millennium that embraces the various membership of the global economy and, more contradictory, to impose the ideological position of one group on that of the rest of the world.

The Political War of Words

I am conscious of the binaries in global ideology and the precarious position in which the latter places the premise of this argument: Africa. Africa is the marginalised Other, the invisible dot on a western atlas which Joseph Conrad’s Marlow calls the Heart of Darkness. I am also conscious of the myth of its “jungles.” As a jungle, the continent has nothing to offer the rest of the world, other than economic and technological dependency. However, the 1997 Kyoto summit on global warming and greenhouse emissions called for urgent action in forest conservation and wild-life protection. Such a call signifies one of the paradoxes of technological and jungle progress. If the backward state of the jungle is now proposed as a toast of global survival, then progress from a technological perspective becomes questionable. Using the language of colonisation, “we summon to memory the languages of our ancestors. What is important, though, is the rediscovery of the power of words of our people. […] all languages of colonisation to be colonised in turn” (Maryse Conde qtd. in Ukadike 246).
Let us take a trip into the “heart of darkness” (Africa) and, from the dark, find the light. “Not all beliefs are of equal importance to us. Some are central, and reach down deep into our being [. . .] and to question them would cause a serious disruption in our lives” (Harrison xv). It has become necessary to question some of the dogmatic ideologies of colonialism which have become what Nietzsche calls the truth: “a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms [. . .] which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people” (“On Truth” 46-47). In order to deconstruct this “mobile army of metaphors,” the cosmological and philosophical position of the Igbo people of Nigeria will be used as the tool of analysis.

The Igbo Philosophical Position

The Igbo of Nigeria have a unique philosophical and cultural belief system. They believe in reincarnation and transcendentalism. The universe is made up of forces. These forces control the rhythm and activities of humans. Human beings are at the centre of all cosmic conflicts. Human survival and progress in such rifts determine what is called progress. Adaptability to the changing rhythms of the cosmos is progress. There are three planes in the universe: the heavenly, the earthly and the underworld planes. The earth supports humans and it is the centre of cosmic motion. Everything revolves around the earth or exhibits its forces to the inhabitants of the earth. In the same way, there are three levels of human transition: from the unborn (the underworld) to the living (earth), and from the living to the ancestral. The ancestors (Ndichie) are the custodians of transitory bodies. They assign new members to communities and accommodate returning sages. Nature and humans move in cyclical rejuvenation. Progress is measured on the basis of human mortification through various levels of initiations, such as the naming ceremony, circumcision, adulthood, marriage, title, priesthood, and funerary rites.

To the Igbo, the universe is a cycle. There is no end, and therefore no beginning. Time is a social construct aimed at following, not changing, the patterns of cosmic motion. There is no linearity of actions or space and time. The concept “millennium” is therefore an artificial construct, which can be regarded in computer terms as a rebooting of cosmic motion for a system upgrade. In it, time ceases to be a monitor of changing patterns. It becomes the determinant of cosmic rhythm. According to Igbo philosophy, any earthly disruption of this rhythm creates a cosmic rift which humans suffer. Instead, time has become the social sphere. Technology, which is monitored by time, has become the knife in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart that has thrust through what held people together, and they have fallen apart. The centre cannot hold because the pivot of the centre is No Longer at Ease. Human values have been displaced and adjudged by a transient fetishisation of technology.

Western Millennial Discourse

The millennium can be defined from a purist point of view as “a fixed period of 1000 years that is found in the Judaic-Christian tradition.” This definition varies according to changes in time and place or in tune with the cosmos (Thrupp 12). It is directly linked to the prophecies in the Book of Revelation in Christian salvationism (Cohn 13) which is concerned with the
last days. The difference between its contemporary liberal application and the original religious connotation can be sociologically distinguished as follows: while the thirteenth-century ascetics (Franciscan spirituals) were concerned with spiritual enrichment through material poverty, contemporary liberal millenarians reverse this concept without reversing its meaning. Our liberal idea of the next millennium, for example, is an eclectic view of enrichments: global, spiritual, material, political, cultural and physical. The liberal millennium is materialistically constructed. However, irrespective of the position of the millennial discourse in question (spiritualism or materialism), the central theme in the overall concept is salvation: salvation from hunger, spiritual bankruptcy, political instability, economic depression, racial subjugation, biological annihilation or global warming.

In what Cohn calls the “tradition of apocalyptic prophecy” (19), the position of the early Jewish prophets who claimed the salvation of the world through “Israel” is not too different from that of present-day America, which assumes a paternalistic position in world politics and intellectual directions. While not making any categorical religious comparisons, it is possible to infer that the spiritual Passover feast of the unleavened bread and lamb of Jewish salvation from Egypt has become user-friendlier through American McDonald’s and other fast-food chains. While historically this horrid sacrificial meal saved the race of Jewish wanderers, McDonald’s and KFC have become synonymous with a society in a hurry, a jetset society, a people of the fast lane, an era of superhighways. This type of spatially displaced society is complemented by temporally displaced activities. In other words, the spatio-temporal dissonance of society has created a disintegrated body trying to catch up with its spatial displacement. The euphoric domain of the new millennium can be interpreted as revolutionary. Its “prophet” becomes a self appointed leader of a disorganised, threatened, peasant society who

lacked the material and emotional support afforded by traditional social groups [. . .] for them there existed no regular, institutionalised methods of voicing their grievances or pressing their claims. Instead they waited for a prophet to bind them together in a group of their own. (Cohn 282)

According to Cohn, millennial movements perceive salvation as collective, terrestrial, imminent, total and miraculous. From the point of view of the disenfranchised, such a hegemonic revolutionary movement, which is a subterfuge for imperialism, is seen as a symbol of identity or an empowerment of the self from political anarchism. The mere idea of millennial movement as collective action is a marginalising doctrine, which capitalises on the weakness of the underclass to deprive them of their power of negotiation. David Aberle, in a “Note on Relative Deprivation Theory as applied to Millenarian and Other Cult Movements,” defines deprivation theory as “a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectation and actuality” (Thrupp 209). He classified deprivation into four categories: possession, status, behaviour and worth, then expectation. Expectation, on the other hand, can be divided into standard and prophetic expectations.
While distinguishing between standard and prophecy expectation, it may be necessary to state that millennial expectation can be classified as standard to the degree to which the expectant has prior knowledge of what to expect. Prior knowledge of expectation can be based only on empirical proof. If this is the case, then we can infer that millennial expectation is a prefabricated market strategy aimed at globalising economic forces for the advancement of the big conglomerates and the exploitation of the poor. It is no longer a millennial expectation, but rather anticipation. But if it is seen as prophetic, it raises the question of whose prophecy it is expected to fulfil. The expected result of millennial preparation is favourable only to the "prophet" whose dream is realised and his/her ideological position concretised by the exploitation of the weak, whose revolutionary spirit is manipulated to achieve such a result. This is a capitalist strategy which Hoogyvelt uses to illustrate Hobbes’s theory of homo homini lupus (man a wolf to men). Global economy is a “jungle of nation-states” where nations are out to devour each other. At the end of the fight, poor nations become sacrificial lambs (Hoogyvelt 7). If Marxist theory is applied to illustrate this position, capital accumulation becomes the best process of eliminating or marginalising poorer nations. Such capital accumulation can take place in the form of labour efficiency whereby machinery replaces human labour. This leads to technological warfare. During this war, emphasis shifts towards technological advantage.

When technological advantage determines the measure of millennial discourse, it does not just exclude non-western Others on the basis of wealth, it also runs contrary to their philosophical belief. Millennial discourse therefore becomes nothing but a western construct and ideological propaganda. It can be seen as an imposition on a world polity, the national objectives of western nations. Such a homogenising ideology is imposed on developing worlds with the aim of creating artificial competitiveness through which the west can define its superiority. According to Luigi Ligutti:

all the political failures of the developing world can be reduced to the fact that in every one there has been little respect shown for (hu)man and no attempt made to vitalise the human community but only to introduce machinery and to make changes on the map. (Introduction, Gheddo xiv).

Unfortunately, developing nations see such gestures as opportunities for global identification.

**Deconstructing Time and Space**

We could use the clock as one of the displacing constructs of technological progress. The invention of the clock is the invention of human enslavement. The clock has dictated human history, activities, rhythm and life. We wake to time, sleep to time, eat to time, mature to time, and work to time. The human body, having been displaced by time, is dependent on time for identity and activity. Therefore, since time is in constant motion, the human body is suspended in spatial flux. According to medical research, the body follows a pattern called circadian rhythm, which influences its chemical and mechanical functions. The brain has a type of "pacemaker"
called the suprachiasmatic nuclei, which regulates the circadian rhythms. But scientists cannot explain precisely how this area in the brain "keeps time." They do know however that the brain relies on outside influences, Zeitgebers ("time-givers") (Mayo [online]). These outside influences range from social to environmental changes.

What can be deduced from this scenario is that the biobody is socially controlled. This is the premise on which Jane Elliot's racial research documentary films Blue Eyed and A Class Divided (aired on SBS-TV in Australia in 1996) were carried out. The environment of operation (social space) affects the productive capacity of the body. Prior to this, pioneer proponents of enlightenment such as Jefferson, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbert, held the belief that "because the environment is crucial to the development of the human mind, society has a responsibility to seek its improvement as a necessary condition for its own progression" (Mungazi xxii).

Unfortunately, the idea has been translated to mean that the improvement of the tools of environmental exploitation is the improvement of human progress. In the final analysis the environment is no longer conducive to the development of the human mind. Changes are made for the sake of change, even when no concrete positive result can be identified. "In all cases, the transition to newly emerging patterns is rocky, unstable and fraught with contradiction, yet also exciting for the new possibilities that are opened up. Although no one can know [. . .]" (Wolfe 12-13).

Temporal positioning controls this social space, and is conditioned, in turn, by the mechanisms of its creation, themselves dependent on the philosophy of its society. If technological determinism, as explained above, is the philosophy of temporal mechanism, then two frightening results emerge: first, the body's attempt to adjust to the dynamics of time would lead to what Heim calls alternate world syndrome. This is a biomechanical disorientation caused by spatio-temporal displacement (Heim 67). Finally, "the social consequences of our technical ingenuity which are far-reaching, cumulative, mutually reinforcing, and irreversible" raise a large question about millennial progress, which Smith says is "the pursuit of technology and science in the interest of human betterment and material prosperity" (Smith and Marx xi-3). Although James Lull says that technology "will give people more time to be more human" (Lull 13), technological determinism is nothing more than "cultural and political fetishism whereby artefacts stand in for technology, and technology in turn signifies national progress" (Smith and Marx 39). The implication is that the world becomes an ever-changing sphere. Nothing remains constant. Everything moves in a constant flux of modification and refinement. By inference, the concept of linearity is self-destructive. It follows the thermodynamic law of unsettling dust. Such a system becomes in itself a flux state, spatially unstable, temporally dynamic; and the body is in confusion. It calls into question the concept of progress. If modern society defines progress in this Heraclitean flux of technological determinism, then there arises the serious question of semantics. First and foremost, it will be logically impossible to measure progress since the body (bearer of meaning) is also dynamic. Let us contextualise the scenario as follows:
Body A measures the activities of Space B
Space B is ever changing
Body A moves as a result of Space B’s pull (Zeitgebers)
Body A and Space B are in constant motion
For Space B’s progress to be measured, Body A must observe from a stable position and compare the past with the present, calculated in space covered over time.
If Space B is pulling body A, it is logical that body A cannot be ahead of Space B
If Body A cannot be ahead of Space B, then it cannot determine their travelling speed until after the journey
If Body A cannot determine the speed of motion, then it cannot measure the progress until after the race
If the race is ever-changing and non-stop, then Body A cannot predict the progress of movement
If Body A is the only inferrer of meaning, then that which cannot be determined cannot be named
If that which cannot be named is the source of human survival then one or two things may happen: there is nothing called that “which cannot be named” if humans survive without it, or that which cannot be named cannot be named by the assigned name.
If that which cannot be named is already named, the next question will be, how did it get the name which cannot be named?

According to Aristotle,

Whatever comes to be must do so either from what is, or from what is not—and neither of these is possible. For what is cannot come to be, since it is already; and nothing can come to be from what is not, since there must be something underlying. (Physics, 1: 8, 191a 25-30)

In other words, for a change or progress to occur, a thing must become what it was not before. If the new thing is to be identified, the identifier must be constant for us to know what was, what is and what has become. But if the observer is also in the same changing system with what is observed (and assumed to change), then that which cannot be known cannot be named, because to name is to identify, and to identify is to understand. In conclusion, either there is nothing called progress or that which is called progress (technology) is an indeterminate dream. The millennium as a period of assessment is only an imaginary construct, which fits perfectly with a hallucinated progress for a society that has lost all aspects of what can be called natural or original. It is the dream of a virtual society for a concretisation of its virtuality at the expense of those who still hold firmly to originality.
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Consumer Capital Has No Boundary Riders

Julienne van Loon

This is a playful and exploratory paper about consumerism and the Australian imagination at the end of the century.

Landscape of the Imagination
(or, Suicide, Anxiety and Leaving the Planet)

Is it still possible to talk about the landscape of the imagination? Is "landscape" the right word? Are we still earthbound? The imagination as a landscape seems to be an ill-fitting metaphor in the age of infinite possibility. Consumer capitalism, through the images of advertising and popular culture, tells us to look beyond our earth-bound imagination, and into the stars.

In Australia, as in many countries, new technologies are sold using images in which objects float, suspended in space. Night-sky blue represents, simultaneously, the future, the yet-to-be-colonised and the promise of unfenced possibility. If you can imagine it, we can build it. Outer space, like the Internet, is perceived as limitless, lawless and inhabitable by all. The future, that is, the millennium and life beyond it, lies somewhere beyond that blue. This is the same wherever on earth you come from.

But there is something problematic in stars and space as metaphors of the future, particularly for Australia. The Southern Cross is already a part of our national iconography and appears not only on the flag, but on corporate logos, and increasingly on images to do with the republic debate. But stars also represent the United States, and that country's penchant for colonising the imagination of the world through popular culture. When I think of the USA colonising Mars, I see stars.

Contemporary advertising's use of the iconography of boundless, empty space is doubly complex for Australia. We have lived with the construct of Australia as Terra Nullius, wide open space, through several generations, and although we know it not to be true, that wide interior, that romanticised emptiness, still occupies our imagination and occurs and recurs in our fictions. The romanticisation and commodification of Aboriginal Dreaming
by the newcomers and the tourism industry is similar, in its reinforcement of a sense of the infinite. Because now not only is Australian space vast and never-ending, but its history is linked to time immemorial. It is in not surprising, therefore, that life after the year 2000 is dreamed about as life without boundaries.

The effect of imagining infinite time and infinite space is one of vertigo. This paper looks into consumerism’s role in this imagining. Particularly it looks at contemporary Australian fiction set in the 1990s, and by “fiction” I mean not just Australian writing, but also, and more broadly, popular culture, including Australian advertising.

Getting High

I have to say that cultural theory really helps me to understand what is happening to me as I travel through any average working week. I sometimes wonder, if I hadn’t actually read contemporary cultural theorists, whether I would think I was the only one on earth to be suffering from anxiety, self-obsessiveness, blurred vision, paranoia, memory loss, exhaustion and multiple personality disorder. Contemporary life is something I both love and hate. I love the constant play of postmodernism’s heterotopian fictions. And I hate the way everyday life encourages me to take on more daydreams than I can cope with. My own consumption is damaging my earth and my body.

Iara Lee, in her wonderful film Synthetic Pleasures, states, “We pleasure ourselves to death.” I agree with her. So how is it, I ask her, that I’m still living? Shortly after the Second World War, advertising executives actually talked about the rational consumer (Miller and Rose 6). At the end of the century, the pace of production, consumption and disposal is so irrational that it “exceeds nature’s ability to recycle wastes and renew basic resources” and this in itself is the profoundly problematic for the future of the planet (Sirianni and Walsh 428). We know this, and yet we dream otherwise.

$123 worth of mobile services at no extra charge.

(You'd be off the planet not to switch)

Optus Business Solutions on 1800 500 001 now.

Advertisement reproduced courtesy of George Patterson Bates, Sydney
In Australia, one of the largest and most appropriate advertising campaigns of the 1990's has got to be *Optus: Yes!*. These two words encompass all the complexities of contemporary Australian consumer capitalism. A company with substantial foreign ownership, competes with a traditionally publicly owned company for its share of the market of the decade: telecommunications. Telecommunications links are now intimately bound up with the imaginary in everyday life, bringing us soap, porn, real-life drama and shopping.

The exclamation "Yes!" tells us there are no limits. Just consume, and forget, it's empowering and other-worldly. This idea, particularly in relation to telecommunications, sells us the future as "digitopia [. . . ] an idealised fusion of public and private cultural space [. . . ] a (r)evolutionary politics of hope" (Lewis).

**Crash Landings**

Despite the promise of hope and satisfaction, the position of consumer is sometimes a dangerous one. We are in danger of saturated consumption: feeling sick. It is the junkie's life, and the line distinguishing among pleasure, death and paranoia is a fine one. As well as this, there is always the possibility, as we become less and less earth-bound, that we may be struck with a crash landing.

It is this threat of the crash landing which has bought about the proliferation of controlled environments. Shopping malls where bad weather cannot keep us away. Rock-climbing studios, where falling doesn't matter. Indoor pools, and indoor playing fields. Safe adventure. Virtual flight. Inside these idyllic structures we can control nature and, in a sense, this is what makes outer space so tantalising as a space to colonise. It's so uninhabitable, we have to live artificially. If there was just some way the stock market could take place in such an anxiety-free, controlled environment, consumer capital could be cast in bronze.

In the Australian lounge room, small crash landings are happening all the time, and serve to make us all rather anxious. The news is the "crash landing" gossip hall. The collective national consciousness, if there is one, is like an aeroplane on a string. Native title, for example, continues to tie us to our landscape, grounding us, reminding us of the boundaries of actual, physical space and the complexities of ownership. In his recent address to the nation, the Hon. Prime Minister's most revealing comment in relation to the Wik issue was that "the sooner we can get this behind us, the better" (Howard). He wanted to get back into the forward-moving vehicle that is the national imagined community and travel on.

Media deaths, too, such as those of Diana Spencer and, more recently, of Michael Hutchence are small crash landings which we consume with unnatural interest. The beauty of these crash landings, lies in the way death is subsumed by story. Death is commodified and therefore overcome, representing not an ending but a spectacularly new heterotopia, a new collective imagining.

Similarly, the threat of the end-of-the-century computer bug is a potential collective crash landing. It carries the extra stigmatisation of the viral, and
because of this also subsumes death, in the promise that the viral lives well beyond death. This threatened crash is one which quite aptly focuses the consumer’s imagination not just on the importance of the millennium, but on that of corporate culture as well.

The Character as Consumer

What does the fear of crash landings do to the psyche? Back in 1991, Australian readers first met Benny, in Peter Carey’s *The Tax Inspector*. Benny is an unlikeable and totally misled character who recites self-actualisation tapes to justify violent, paranoid and self-destructive behaviour. Benny’s psyche symbolises Baudrillard’s notion of the triumph of surface and pure objectification over the depth of desire. In the novel, Carey writes:

He was stupid maybe, but he could not continue to be what he was, and when Cathy fired him he had already spent $400 on a Finance and Insurance course at the Zebra motor inn and he had passed it—no problem with the numbers.

He had also spent $495 on the self actualisation cassettes, $300 on the suit, $150 on sundries, and as for where the money came from, that was no one’s business and totally untraceable. So when his father began by saying, no way was he going to sell cars, all he did was ask himself “How do I attain the thing that I desire?”

Then he followed the instructions of the “Self actualisation” cassettes, descending the imaginary coloured stairways to the mental picture of the imaginary Sony Trinitron which showed the object of his desire. (25)

Benny’s attempt to transform himself comes from a real need to escape his environment and his position as victim. But material desire and spiritual desire are confused, and Benny, for all his stupidity, can’t be blamed for seeing a connection between what he has bought and paid for, and what he might become. It is no secret that advertising is geared toward manipulating desires that may or may not have anything to do with the product being sold. All saleable objects offer some sense of an escape route, but it is a problematic escape which, as Tracy Davis notes, can ultimately lead us further into, and not away from, suburban life.

A most significant link between *The Tax Inspector* and the millennium is evident in the novel’s ending. Here is an ending which, in the lead-up, has all the explosiveness and drama of a Hollywood action thriller. But after the family business explodes, miraculously, everyone survives. They wander aimlessly about the wreckage, wondering what to do with themselves. Benny’s angel-wing tattoo is the last image Carey leaves us with: “It was red,” he writes, “blue, green, luminous, trembling like a dragonfly, like something smashed against the windscreen of a speeding car” (279). In many ways, this is the speeding car of late capitalism. Boundaries between life and death, beginning and ending, are not strict. The car merely continues.

Interestingly, the self-actualisation cassette reappears on the Australian screen with Ben Mendelsohn’s character in the 1996 film *True Love and*
Chaos. His is a somewhat watered-down copy of Carey’s angel of death, but is no less drug-fucked and destructive. The return (ad infinitum) of the road-movie/drug-run script is just as shallow in this film as in any, but the misled, undersold dealer screams easily across the Nullarbor instead of the American midwest. In this film, the risk of death is simply a way of drawing the narrative forward, and birth is symbolised no more romantically, in Miranda Otto’s periodic bouts of throwing up. Morning sickness is a distinctly female and grotesque connection with new beginnings, and an unknown future.

The heroin dealer, it seems, is a common nineties hero/anti-hero. He is distinctly greedy and capitalistic by nature, uncaring and unforgiving. Even more beautiful and appealing is the fact that his illegal status places him beyond the legitimate reach of the multinationals. He is therefore beyond advertising, and yet his product has all the promise of the highly advertised commodity. In the short term, it has a greater capacity than most products to satisfy consumer anxiety. Heroin postpones the future, or at least seems to. In the long term, addiction leads to a level of criminality which anti-capitalist youth may see as a life outside consumer capital. Nevertheless, capitalism’s ability to foster such a subculture means the growth of an illegitimate market can only work in favour of the legitimate one in the long term. Heroin addiction is cleverly marketed through the popular using the tactics of resistance (de Certeau, qtd. in Bridge 613) and creates jobs and markets in both legitimate and illicit industries. Its very attraction for users is in the way they are consumed and transformed by it. “Opium” does well as a perfume.

Justine Ettler’s 1995 novel The River Ophelia doesn’t need to take to the wide open spaces of Australia’s open road to play out its preoccupation with a lack of boundaries. The River Ophelia takes place solely within the controlled environment of the city. A totally obsessive masochistic persona, barely distinguishable from the author, rides a wave of subversion, spinning on her heels to tease de Sade, Bataille, Shakespeare and death. The body is the site of pleasure and abuse simultaneously. The character is withdrawn and self-obsessed. Encounters are both real and imagined, violent and tender.

Ettler is the consumer struck with a hopeless, irreplaceable sense of “absence.” She is frightened to be alone, her imagination overrun by the banned literature/pornography of others. Ettler’s prose flips between the mundane (describing in excruciating detail the facile nature of Sydney’s nightclub scene and the one-bedroom flat in which she lives) and the illicit (giving words to the unspeakable). She is almost beyond suicide, beyond anxiety: her persona appropriates and consumes and surrenders, and then starts all over again, in pain, but without loss of appetite. She is either flying high or scraping the barrel. At the end, when the reader thinks she just has to collapse, Justine is simply waiting, she says, for “an angel, a new beginning.” Another round please. With this character in mind, we need to ask how much is consumerism infused with the bipolar? Justine fits easily the manic-depressive template. It is both interesting and significant that the World Health Organisation recently added “gross overspending” to its list of mania symptoms (Hawley 34).
Of course not all contemporary Australian characters are having such a violent time of it, but an outstanding number are outrageously confused by the complexity of their own consumer desire, many to the point of hysterics. Joanne Burns has famous authors cruising in status symbol cars (39). Beth Spencer, in _The Stories of Barbara Boulevard_, has her character looking at a picture postcard of two lions fucking. "It is difficult to tell," she writes, "if the lions are enjoying it or hating it. It is a bit like the goblet with the faces. And there is no inbetween, no fence to sit on. They are either hating it or loving it" (7).

The Pleasure of Infinity

Tensions between individual, commercial and cultural interests certainly don’t render the consumer powerless, but this tension does muck around with our insecurities and the way we perceive ourselves as individuals and as a collective.

The pleasure of the imaginary is in the way it helps to dislocate us from everyday life, but also in the way it helps us to picture our community, our nation, through any number of images. We are, through consumption, able to locate a space for ourselves in a world of flux (Harvey 156). But it certainly isn’t a grounded, earthly space. Nor, questionably, is it a sustainable space. The millennium hovers, like a satellite inspection station, before us and it seems we are quite frantic about it, self-conscious, even paranoid about passing through. If they ask us to look down, will we jump?

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Don’t worry, says Toyota Australia. If you fall back to earth, there’ll be a vehicle somewhere in “the red centre,” just waiting just for you.
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Oneself as the Other: The Biography Revolution

Kateryna Olijnyk Longley

Babble, babble, babble, words. [. . .] and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life.

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*

I invented my memories, not knowing what I was doing, not one is of me.

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnameable*

"*We've got the end of everything in our town.*"

"The end of what?" [ . . . ]

"*The end of all world history, that's what! What do we need it for?*"

Andrei Platonov, *Chevengur*

It has been clear for some time now that the great imperial genre of history has been losing its authority, to the extent that, as a recent reviewer of a new history book predicted, "poor old history" will soon have more historians writing in defence of their "embattled discipline" than writing history. The book being reviewed was actually entitled *In Defence of History* and the enemy responsible for this state of affairs is, not surprisingly, identified as poststructuralism, whose proponents the book describes as "intellectual barbarians at the disciplinary gates [. . .] loitering there with distinctly hostile intent" (Evans 40). Suddenly it appears that history is fighting for its life. In fact, many would say, the fight is almost over and the end of the millennium will witness the death throes of the genre as we have known it for several centuries in what is still called, with ever-increasing discomfort, the western world.
How has this happened and why now? Few would disagree that poststructuralism has, indeed, undermined history’s primary representational mode, the mode of realism, as well as a range of other essential tools and conventions upon which history depends. I would argue, however, that there is another less high-profile and less formidable “enemy” than poststructuralism that has played a major role in disabling the history giant, and that this damage has been done not by a direct attack but rather by a multitude of small, barely noticeable bites and cuts, followed by a random but unstoppable white-anting from within (see Longley, “Little Histories”). Ironically, that destroyer of history is itself a form of history, one which has traditionally been seen as a contributing genre, albeit a minor one, a source of authenticating detail, where required, for the big historical picture. The genre I am referring to can be described broadly as biography, but, as I will also argue, biography is itself undergoing a revolution, to the extent that it urgently needs new approaches and a new vocabulary. Biography, with its long established history of respectability, is becoming more adventurous, more rebellious, and displaying a larrikin spirit. As a result, biography is now better equipped to negotiate with other genres such as fiction and history in order to survive and prosper. In fact, it routinely raids the other genres and trespasses on their territory for whatever suits its purposes. In other words, the most devotedly realist of genres, and the one traditionally most closely aligned with history’s quest for the recording of “true” events, has turned traitor to history. Far from being history’s handmaiden, “biography” has taken the form of a predatory chameleon, able to move freely amongst the genres it feeds upon, with no regard for territorial boundaries. And yet it has not simply defected to the other side, the side of poststructuralism and postmodernism, but moves easily through and between realist and postmodern modes. No longer necessarily declaring itself as biography, it aligns itself with neither fiction nor with history but rather with storytelling, story-telling that springs from the lived, remembered experience. In order to accommodate these trends in the genre, I will use the term “bionarratives” rather than “biography” or “autobiography” in this paper for the various hybrid forms of life-story writing and telling that are currently capturing mass interest and mass markets in an unprecedented way in the closing years of the twentieth century.¹

Why are these changes occurring now? A logical macro-explanation that make sense to me links these changes to global political reorganisation: the opening of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the policy of apartheid in South Africa, the formation of the European Economic Community, the Mabo decision in Australia and the late twentieth-century world-wide shake-up of structures of domination and allegiance. Each of these changes, one by one, has played havoc with the

¹ See Sue Cant “Biography Gets a New Lease of Life.” She reports on the upsurge of interest in biography, autobiography and life writing. See also the Editorial in The Weekend Australian 19-20 April 1997, which ends with the comment, “It can only be hoped that more fiction writers venture into journalism, the essay, the biography and memoir, breaking down an established hierarchy and giving us more true Australian stories, better told” (46).
trajectories of national histories and so created spaces for alternative, minor histories to be told or written, with no necessary connection to the official lines of history. It is precisely because they were minor that such histories used to pose no threat. They were not even necessarily overtly oppositional. They were merely personal reminiscences and testimonies, stories of individual lives, usually lives without special significance or influence in the traditional arena of history. Or so it seemed.

At the same time the official national/list knowledge and history factories have lost control over their captive markets. In the former Soviet Union the change has been breathtakingly spectacular. In Australia an example of this process, albeit paced more slowly, can be found in the current national Wik debate over the competing claims of native title and settler pastoral leases. It has been noted repeatedly in the press that even a decade ago such a debate would not have occurred because Aboriginal voices would not have been heard. There has been a shift in power relations between black and white Australians, and I believe that the stories of individual Aboriginal people have had a great deal to do with it. Not only the steady stream of life stories published over the past 15 years for the general public, such as Labumore’s *An Aboriginal Mother Tells of the Old and the New*, Ruby Langford Ginibi’s *Don’t Take Your Love to Town* and Sally Morgan’s *My Place*, but also the many private stories more obliquely cut into the consciousness of Australians via media reports relating to the Human Rights Commissions on Black Deaths in Custody and on the Stolen Generation.

My claim is that such stories have massively influenced historical consciousness in Australia (and beyond), and that arguably the most important literary shift that has occurred in the last two decades can be described in terms of the penetration of biornarratives into every media and art form. On the radio and on television, there is an ever-increasing interest in the individual “life” or life-sketch captured in programs such as *Australian Story* or the new ABC program called *Snapshots* that provides 60-second features on Australians talking about their lives—“what moves them, what excites them [. . .]” (“Today” 1)—as well as talk-back sessions and interview programs. In the national newspaper, the trend expresses itself in the relatively new policy of attaching a personal story to each featured report of a broad political, legal or financial issue. Whether the report is of a shift in interest rates or of a change in weather patterns or in legislative trends, the general point is driven home via the words and the photograph of a particular “ordinary” person or family selected, as though at random (there is no convention of explaining the choice), from the general population of citizens.

How can this hunger for the particular experience—the real, the first-hand, the authentic—be understood in relation to the current domination of postmodernism and its critical offshoot, poststructuralism, as explanatory models for our cultural moment? Has not postmodernism irreversibly dismantled the quest for the real? How can we explain this paradox: of

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1 Marko Pavlyshyn, President of the Australian Association for Ukrainian Studies, who recently visited Russia and Ukraine, confirmed this.
postmodernist theory's rejection of the possibility that texts can reach the "reality" of an experience, coinciding with an explosion of interest in texts committed to recording such reality? It is via this question that I want to try to unravel some puzzles and contradictions relating to the role of bio-narratives within the postmodern textual climate of the end of this century. In particular, I want to prepare the ground for exploring the role of postmodern memory as a tool for representing the self, the self as the other, in history.¹

But first there is another kind of question that needs to be asked: If the big history battle has been lost, what is the point of starting it up again everywhere in the small arenas of individual lives? This question takes me towards the central point of this paper—and that is that during the twentieth century both history and postmodernism have failed the individual life. History did so by shutting out the individual life as a matter of generic policy while postmodernism did the same thing by pronouncing the project futile. And that is why it is now so easy for bionarratives to step in. The current proliferation of life stories, the renewed efforts to write stories of the self against the odds are, I believe, expressions of a profound dissatisfaction with both of the major representational trends of this century—on the one hand, social realism (which can be aligned with modernism and with history) and, on the other, anti-realist textual play (which is the hall-mark of literary postmodernism). Between them, these modes have failed to accommodate the life story. Perhaps the genre of history could have provided a vehicle for the life story (and in fact it did so if the life was "great"² enough to be considered worthy of inserting into the broad historical canvas, but history has been so seriously tainted by its well-earned reputation as a direct agent of oppressive political structures that it is virtually unusable in this context. Further, its traditional concealment of the problematics of textuality, especially in relation to the position and authority of the narrator, render it useless for the representation of life-experience which is defined and driven by, precisely, the unique position of the narrator: "I was there," the narrator of the life-story asserts, or "I am the very same person of whom I write," or "I was the listener and recorder of these memories." Postmodernism, however, presents different problems for the telling of life-stories: to the above assertions it has a simple retort: "The ‘I’ and the ‘memories’ have no privileged access to the ‘life’; they are both merely convenient metaphors which enable the irreducible otherness of the past and of the self to be managed." This is not the moment for elaborating on this point, which has been variously and wonderfully explored by many of this century’s thinkers, amongst them Bakhtin, Ricoeur,

¹ I have explained the notion of "postmodern memory" in a paper presented at the "Postmodernism in Practice" conference held in Adelaide in February 1998 and convened by John Kaye and the Discursive Construction of Knowledge Group at Adelaide University.

² A similar point is made by Deleuze and Guattari in Anti-Oedipus: "One word here on the disgrace of psychoanalysis in history [. . .] The procedure is well known: two figures are made to appear, the Great Man and the crowd. One then claims to make history with these two entities [. . .]" (102, 103).
Heidegger, Bergson, Kristeva and Barthes, but I will let two brief quotations from Roland Barthes on Roland Barthes serve the purpose of acknowledging that field of exploration:

I had no other solution than to rewrite myself—at a distance, a great distance—here and now: to add to the [ . . . ] memories, to the texts, another utterance, without ever knowing whether it is about my past or my present that I am speaking. [ . . . ] Far from reaching the core of the matter, I remain on the surface. (142)

I am speaking about myself in the manner of the Brechtian actor who must distance his character. (168)

Life stories have, then, fallen between the two major narrative modes of the century. Far from this being their loss, this is why, I would argue, they are now such free agents with great strategic advantages. Taking many forms and taking whatever they want to take from realist and postmodernist modes of representation, from history and from fiction, bionarratives now constitute a major culturo-literary force. They do not even have to bother to be subversive. They have simply slid in and occupied bits of the territory of the genres which traditionally excluded them. They have done this without a single battle being fought but, rather, in a manner which is well described by the Deleuzian model of nomadic textual activity, or better still, of the rhizome: “The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots” (See Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, esp. 24). Bionarratives are also recognisably “outlaw genres,” to use Caren Kaplan’s simpler model (119), but in the special sense that they can choose to operate outside—or inside—the mainstream system because they do not recognise the boundaries.

I have said that the two major modes of representation have failed to provide adequately for the life-story. The particular failure I want to focus on now is the failure to confront pain. Over two centuries of colonial conquest, it is no accident that the narratives of imperial history have left pain out. Nor is it surprising. What is surprising is that the narrative counter-movements of postmodernism did the same from the opposite side of the discursive fence.

As a result we can look back on a century of “unthinkable catastrophes,” experienced on an unprecedented scale, a “post-traumatic century,” to use Shoshana Felman’s terminology, but one which, in the recording of even its greatest horrors, has not let pain in (qtd. in Tal 54). This is the profound failure of twentieth-century narrative.

That is not to say that pain was entirely excluded in the traditional life-writing genres: it was alluded to and acknowledged in a general way—at times it was even mythologised, as Kali Tal points out in her book, Worlds of Hurt.1 But even then pain was not given the same attention as other kinds of experience and information. And, more commonly, it was simply left

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1 Kali Tal sees this mythologising as “a crucial component of the depoliticisation of the survivor” (59).
out. Whereas the memoir was a form which could at times accommodate pain (see, for example the memoirs of W.B. Yeats, Virginia Woolf, holocaust accounts or the diaries of Anne Frank), even there a kind of censorship, sometimes of self-censorship, distanced and attenuated the experience, made it manageable and acceptable to a reading public not accustomed to having to cope with anything beyond that which could be handled in polite company. It was as though life writing had developed in the west as a colonial drawing-room genre, adopting the good manners of civilised conversation. Pain could be alluded to but the wounds could not be shown. It is well-known that even letters written from the trenches of the First World War were censored. While this was, ostensibly, in the interests of national morale, at the same time the deletion of pain from even these most intimate texts written out of suffering constituted a reaffirmation of the culture of the stiff upper lip and the cult of unflinching heroism which underpinned not only the fiction and history of western Europe and Australia but also the personal realm of biography. Hence the letdown when biographies of the great were read. We learned a great deal about “events” (“Where is the event, in what does an event consist [. . .]. Any event is a fog in a million droplets [. . .],” Deleuze and Parnet 65) but discovered very little of what the people thought and felt. In an issue of last week’s national newspaper there was, for example, a review of the historian Martin Gilbert’s new book entitled, with dazzling bravado, *The History of the Twentieth Century*. In this context it is worth quoting a comment from the review referring to Gilbert’s earlier volumes on Winston Churchill:

In those books [. . .] it was as though he had taken Churchill’s appointment diary and combined it with his speeches and correspondence to produce an hour-by-hour account [. . .]. It was about the what and when rather than the how and why. (Day 31)

It would appear that Deleuze and Guattari’s model of history as “Great Man plus crowd” is well exemplified here.

This case is typical. What is missing, even in the story of an individual in history, is precisely that person’s story. I predict that the next century will see an intensified search for ways of representing the personal experience and, particularly, pain, as this whole century’s written and remembered history is sealed off, encapsulated and looked at from the new space of the third millennium.

The fact of the “close” of the millennium will itself cast history into new configurations. Because it is a marker that can only have parodic force for Australians, whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, the millennial moment attracts attention to some inescapable political questions relating to the process of constructing “our” past. Whose millennium is it? Whose history does it serve? Could it be that the *packaging* of time is itself a weapon in history’s hands? And could it be that time’s larger spans and configurations collude in parcelling away the detail, especially the painful detail, so that we

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1 I have written elsewhere about this reconfiguring effect, drawing upon the work of Paul Ricoeur (Kateryna Longley, “Recasting History”).
can put it all behind us as each span “ends”—so that we need not confront it now? I am arguing here that biornarratives are successfully undermining this millennial imperative.

I do not want to suggest, however, that the problem of writing pain has somehow been overcome by these various biornarrative forms. It has not. Pain is culturally and generically codified just as all other kinds of experience are—the writing of pain is the writing stories of memories of pain within specific inescapable conventions. However, the representation of pain presents special problems because there are greater demands placed on language than for everyday experience, as Dante knew and as every writer knows. What I am saying is that biornarratives have no special traditional or ideological reason to avoid pain and so they seek to acknowledge the history of pain that exists in every nation, in every culture and in every life. Interestingly, in the context of the millennium, there is so much biornarrative activity that it is as though people rush to try to tell their stories before the millennial shutters come down. The millennial closure becomes a kind of deadline for having one’s say, for not letting history get away with its version of the past century.

There are now many examples of biornarratives which are attempting to confront pain, and the increasing awareness of the importance of this process and its difficulties is formally acknowledged by the forthcoming conference on the topic “Trauma and Memory: Cross-Cultural Perspectives.”¹ My interest springs from my biographical project, pursued intermittently over the past 20 years, transcribing and translating my parents’ narratives. These are stories of their experiences in pre-revolution Russia, in Stalin’s Soviet Union, in Hitler’s camps, and then of arrival in Australia.² Because the narratives are mostly of lost worlds, in the geographic sense as well as the temporal, they have highlighted for me the special position of narratives of displacement (the stories of those who have been separated from homelands, cultures, languages and families) in relation to memory and the past. It seems to me that narratives of displacement are more aware of the gaps between the self of the past, the self of the present and the self of the story. The past is more unambiguously elsewhere than for someone for whom home has been a constant. One is always a visitor, a stranger to one’s past but it is the stories of people who have been physically displaced and estranged from their traditional worlds which best make this point because the temporal and spatial estrangements are felt, bodily, to be inseparable. This double displacement always frames my parents’ vision and their stories.

To try to find an explanation for the rise of biornarratives I want to turn now to Walter Benjamin’s ideas about storytelling. Making a clear

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¹ “Trauma and Memory: Cross-Cultural Perspectives” conference, University of New South Wales, 23-24 May 1998.
² Some stories have been published. See, for example, Kateryna Olijnyk Longley: “Tato” in Harbour, “The Fifth World” in Striking Chords, “Origins and Destinations” in Masks, Tapestries, Embroideries, and “Places of Refuge: Postcolonial Spaces” in SPAN 44.
distinction between *information* and storytelling, Benjamin blames one for undermining the other. In 1955 he writes,

> It is indispensible for information to sound plausible. Because of this it is incompatible with the spirit of storytelling. If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs. (*Illuminations* 89)

Half a century ago Benjamin could not have imagined the scale of the information explosion which characterises the end of the millennium. He recognised information as a threat to the novel, the genre which had itself deposed storytelling. Taking Benjamin’s argument further, I would say that information has been equally destructive of history and has, in fact, taken over its role. Ironically, storytelling is flourishing again in spite of or perhaps because of the unrelenting noise and frenzy of the information assault upon our lives.

In Australia, less than 20 years ago, Aboriginal bionarratives suddenly entered the book market as texts, which did not quite fit the genres of formal biography, or of history, or of information, or of fiction. Immigrant stories followed a similar pattern. At the time that these stories began to appear, I remember, it was difficult to know under which categories to look for them on the bookshelves. And they were received at first in ambivalent ways — as not in command of genre, as homespun and simple, as “merely” personal stories, as confessional, as exotic. All this gradually changed and in fact I believe such stories, in the eighties, played a major role in setting in motion the bionarrative revolution.¹ What they had in common was a commitment to telling stories of remembered lives and to somehow, getting it “right” in their own terms.

But what is remembering, and how does it operate in relation to painful experience? While it is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to these questions, I want nevertheless to touch on them briefly. As the end of the millennium approaches, memory itself becomes different, becomes more conscious of itself, remembers itself. Recently, theories of otherness, drawn from postcolonial studies as well as from psychoanalysis and philosophy, have highlighted the ways in which remembering and “witnessing” are as much processes of displacing as of recuperating. Built into the word *remembering* is the idea of putting limbs on something, making it walk and gesticulate, giving it life, though fake life, of course. Poststructuralism has made the performance of memory “less anxious” by releasing it from its obligation to tell the truth and giving it instead the freedom to try out and parade its many strategies for faking it. But, on the other hand, the monumental untruth of history demands that postmodern memory have an ethical dimension. In bionarratives this translates into the imperative to *do justice* to the lives of those whose stories are told.

¹ See, for example, the Australian Aboriginal life writing of Alice Beelie, Sally Morgan, Bill Neidge, Glenys Ward and also Sneja Gunew’s immigrant writing collections and Marko Pavlyshyn’s *Ukrainian Settlement in Australia*, with its emphasis on the oral story telling culture of the Ukrainian Diaspora. Other examples are referred to in my article “Little Histories.”
The ancient lure of the story, for centuries the key weapon of novel, is now back in the hands of life-writers. Experimentation has by no means been pushed out by this trend but it is tending to acknowledge the power of the story. And the worldwide web is an unexpected ally in the bionarrative revolution in that it encourages confession, sharing, pouring out your own story to a community which is somehow intimate and remotely global at the same time. It provides a way of going public and yet retaining anonymity if that’s what you want. And web stories are written as though spoken. Webtext is neither writing nor speech; it is everywhere and nowhere; and it will no doubt become an increasingly influential medium for bionarrative.

In closing I want to mention a dilemma for bionarratives in relation to pain. However the narrative chooses to remember pain, in confronting pain it needs to re-enact the moment of pain and every re-enactment is a wound inflicted upon the self. Even if the wounding is a healing at the same time, the repetition itself presents an ethical dilemma. I face it and avoid it every time I listen to my parents’ stories, which I am gradually, gathering, writing down and publishing. Even though they press me to do it, the question remains, how can I resolve the ethical dilemmas involved in writing these stories for public consumption when they are full of pain and deeply private. “The visual,” writes Frederic Jameson, “is essentially pornographic” because it invites us to “stare at the world as though it were a naked body” (1). Is writing any different? Am I let off the hook simply because there are no pictures. Imagination, after all, is visual. In the recent book Social Suffering, the editors make the related point that “collective suffering is [...] a core component of global political economy. There is a market for suffering; victimhood is commodified” (Kleinman et al., xi). One of the chapters in the same book refers to “the cultural appropriation of suffering in our times” and considers the case of a journalist who won a prestigious prize for his eloquent photograph of a dying child.

Could it be that bionarratives run the risk of appropriating and selling pain in a parallel way? Even though the answer can only be yes, it seems to me that the risks nevertheless have to be taken. Then the critical questions in relation to representation in the early years of the post-historical period of the third millennium will be ethical questions relating to the failure of narrative to do justice to the memories of pain in this century.

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“Is It Armageddon?” Some Problems with Discourses of Change in Museums

Andrea Witcomb

In July of 1989, the British Museums Journal ran an editorial which posed a stark question for its readers: “Is It Armageddon?” (Green 8). The context for this apocalyptic outburst was the then recent marketing campaign for the Victoria and Albert Museum of a series of posters displayed in the London Underground which advertised the V & A as “an ace caff with quite a nice museum attached.” The advert upset the traditional clientèle of the Museum as well as the Museum establishment not only by its obvious commercial emphasis, which put a place of consumption before the museum, but also because it undermined the association of the museum with the cultural élite—an élite which would never frequent a “caff.”

The tensions over the advertising campaign were also a manifestation of a deeper sense of dissatisfaction and anger over changes in the museum itself. For the populist rhetoric in the advert had its corollary in structural changes in the museum, changes which were aimed at widening the museum’s audience by changing the style of exhibitions developed by its staff. The V & A had undergone a radical restructuring in which as many as nine of its leading curators had been asked to resign. This left the museum without subject specialists heading its departments. From the management’s point of view, this was in line with its restructuring philosophy which aimed for a more thematic style of exhibitions that did not require subject specialists. From a curatorial point of view, however, it meant the loss of expertise, of international standing and professionalism.

The highly emotional reaction to this advertising campaign and the institutional changes which accompanied it is only one example of a number of heated debates around museums which use highly emotive language and an apocalyptic, millennial tone to suggest that what is happening in museums represents the end of an era and the emergence of a new period (see, for examples on both sides of the debate, Boylan; Fowler; Hewison; Miles and Zavala; Walsh; Watkins). While the debate has been particularly heated in Britain, it has also taken form anywhere that tourism and popular culture are affecting the practices and image of traditional cultural institutions like art galleries and museums (Australian examples of the debate include: Anderson; Morgan).
In this paper I am concerned with tracing both the contours and the reasons for the emergence of this debate. The aim is to extend the debate and its analysis beyond the form in which it has taken shape so far, in order to enable some kind of reconciliation between demands for change and the possibilities offered by traditional institutions like museums. I will illustrate what this reconciliation might look like by comparing a recent experience in developing an exhibition on the Portuguese community in Perth with the choices defined by the heritage debate.

The most common way to understand the debate over the emergence of a heritage industry, and one which I have used myself in the past, is to explain the debate in terms of a traditional distaste on the part of "the educated" for the incursions of commerce into the sphere of cultural activity. For example, Robert Lumley argues that the problem for many critics of the heritage industry is that heritage and by extension museums have come to be understood as an industry. For Lumley it is the collapse of a distinction between economic and cultural activity that frightens critics of the heritage industry into apocalyptic predictions and paranoid projections about the end of professionalism, morality, truth, objectivity, history, the importance of the object, and so on.

Like Lumley, Adrian Mellor also tends to think that the apocalyptic tone is more strident in "those instances where 'heritage' meets 'enterprise' [. . .] Real dismay is reserved for the conjunction of 'history' and 'commerce': for the moment of commodification" (101). Thus he quotes Waldemar Januszczak who, in writing about the Albert Dock, feels that the Tate Gallery is misplaced in the consumerist ethic promoted by the leisure and entertainment precinct. The gallery, Januszczak says, "must compete with the jaunty sea-faring mood that is being cultivated around it in the theme dock (the pizzas in the café opposite have names like The Trafalgar and Bosun's Surprise)" (qtd. in Mellor 101).

Mellor goes further, suggesting that this distaste for the incursion of market forces and the use of a moralist discourse is used to hide élite cultural values. As he sees it, "By the late 1980s [. . .] the omnipresence of 'nostalgia' had become the prime focus of educated concern, and was serving the current generation of the chattering classes in much the same way as their forebears had been served by the evils of gin, the decline of religious belief, horror comics, and juke-box boys" (97).

While there is no doubt a significant element of truth in these remarks, I want to suggest that the debate is in fact far more complex than these analyses have allowed. As I will attempt to show, the debate moves over a lot of terrain—from discussions about the impact of tourism on museums and heritage sites to the changing structures of museum staffing, the diminishing importance of objects in exhibitions, the rise of "interactive" media-oriented displays, the loss of curatorial authority, questions of access, cultural diversity, representation, and so on. To point out the conservative nature of those who dislike the commercialisation of cultural practices is, I would argue, a rather limiting framework for understanding these debates.

Rather than ask who is conservative, who progressive, who élitist, who democratic, I would rather ask a broader question: how can institutions such
as museums, which are steeped in a notion of tradition and cultural continuity, deal with rapid change? And if they do change, articulating themselves to the fast speeds of the media, of tourism, of consumerism, is there any value in what is lost? For it seems to me that the heritage debate, as it has come to be known, is a contemporary example of an experience which we usually associate with periods of rapid change, such as the development of modern forms of urban life in the nineteenth century. Like then, "all that is solid melts into air." ¹ If, in nineteenth-century Paris, the loss of solidity seemed to be associated with the new experiences found in the streets and in the department stores (see Buck-Morss), in the late twentieth century it is experienced across media spheres and the processes of globalisation with its attendant movement of populations, finance, information, goods and images. These are all processes which have an impact on traditional institutions like museums (see, for example, Appadurai and Breckenridge; Witcomb).

This framing of the issues in terms of a question about the relationship between the traditional and the contemporary, between slow-moving institutions and the need for fast responses, between high culture and the need for an integration with contemporary popular culture, is reflected in the media’s treatment of new museum developments as well as in the comments of “progressive” museum professionals. However, such commentators see it as a question which demands a choice rather than a relationship between the two poles. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, ran a number of articles in 1988, all in a similar tone. “Museums Blast from the Past” announced one headline: “As Government purse strings tighten, public institutions such as libraries, art galleries and museums can no longer sit quietly on their foundation and wait for crowds. Once-staid places have lifted their skirts and vie with a cheeky newcomer for image, audience and the precious corporate dollar” (Abjorensen 8).

If stasis, or at least slow responses, were out, then speedy answers were in. Museums, in siding with new technologies, consumerism and marketing, could overcome their traditional stasis and become relevant institutions. To change, to side with the new had to involve a radical break with the past. Aided by the blunt comments of senior museum administrators, the article made a decisive plunge to side with the new. Invoking the authority of Des Griffin, a long-time leader in the Australian museum community, the association of museums with tradition is wiped away: “The days of museums being dull places full of stuffed dead things in glass cases are gone” (Griffin, qtd. in Abjorensen 8). Margaret Coadleke, acting director of the Powerhouse Museum shortly after its opening in 1988, was also quoted on the side of change: “We must and indeed, all museums must, as we enter the 21st century—respond to public needs. Marketing must—identify these needs and pick up audiences.” She went on to explain that, “That’s really the change that has come over museums both in this country and overseas in

¹ While the phrase is originally Shakespeare’s and was used by Marx, it has been taken up as the title of Marshall Berman’s book dealing with the experience of modernity in the city. It is this latter context to which I am referring.
the last 20 to 30 years. That is, in recognising the audience and dealing with it as a consumer market using all the tools of the commercial world in selling itself. My main brief in charge of services and marketing was to ensure a widening of the traditional audience” (Coaldrake, qtd. in Abjorensen 9).

Despite the millennial tone of these remarks and in particular the positing of a radical break with the past, the debate over the appropriate relationship between museums and their audiences, between tradition and emerging cultural practices, has a long history. At the very moment that museums were emerging as public institutions in the nineteenth century, cultural critics were also posing questions about the appropriate relationship between tradition, aesthetic values and the needs of “the masses.” Like many commentators today, much of the debate sought to defend the values of tradition, scholarship and aural culture. Gustav Waagen, for example, sought to preserve the space of the new National Gallery in London as a space apart from the street crowds and life of the city. The presence of the working classes within the gallery, according to Waagen, made it impossible to undertake an aesthetic appreciation of the collection and physically endangered the conservation of the pictures. The National Gallery, he said, had all the appearance of a large nursery, several wet nurses having regularly encamped there with their babies for hours together; not to mention persons, whose filthy dress tainted the atmosphere with a most disagreeable smell. The offensiveness [. . .] from these two classes [. . .] I have found so great that, in spite of all my love for the pictures, I have more than once been obliged to leave the building [. . .] It is highly important, for the mere preservation of the pictures, that such persons should in future be excluded from the National Gallery. The exhalations produced by the congregation of large numbers of persons, falling like vapour upon the pictures, tend to injure them; and this mischief is greatly increased in the case of the two classes of persons alluded to [. . .] it is scarcely too much to require, even from the working man, that, in entering a sanctuary of Art [. . .] he should put on such decent attire as few are without. (Waagen, qtd. in Trodd 42-43)

If, in the nineteenth century, the debate was conducted around the need to separate the museum from the culture of the modern city, from the masses, from the streets, from popular entertainment (See Bennett; Greenhalgh; Trodd), the debate in the late twentieth century is not dissimilar. Issues of education versus entertainment are called into play alongside debates about the continued relevance of the material world, the values of scholarship and cultural authority. If in the nineteenth century the offenders were the people of the street, in the late twentieth century the offenders are the media, especially television, postmodernists and generalists.

For example, Charles Watkins, in an article in the American museum journal *Curator* entitled “Are Museums Still Necessary?” expressed his intense dissatisfaction with a museological practice intent on providing pleasure and gratification of the senses rather than hard knowledge. He sees this move as responsible for the loss of the centrality of objects in museums. This is a loss which he attributes to the new orientation to the market. In developing his arguments, he positions himself as wanting to maintain the traditional
authority of the museum voice in establishing the frameworks for knowledge. To let go of this authority, he argues, is also to let go of professionalism, connoisseurship, and a focus on the authenticity of objects. So, for example, the problem with providing reproductions in the museum shop is that they “prevent an appreciation of the original” and “will eventually supersede the need for such an appreciation” (30). In a similar vein, Watkins questions the effects of the “new museology” on the authority of the museum. He is especially concerned about a museology which deconstructs ideas of authenticity. It would be all right, he says, “if all of this were simply hairsplitting by European academics [. . .] but there are examples of the practical application of such ideas” (28).

Rather than questioning the value of originals and the importance of authenticity, Watkins argues, museums should be teaching it to the population at large. A good exhibition is one which “allows each visitor to learn how curators evaluate historic furniture for quality and authenticity” (27). An exhibition which is “shaped by the visitor’s experience, not the show’s content” (Vokert, qtd. in Watkins 27) is for Watkins “laudable from a sociological perspective,” but “tends to undermine the authority of museums and suggests that every person can ultimately become his or her own curator” (27-28).

The article was severely criticised by a number of museum professionals, not all of whom were curators. This in itself indicates that curatorial work no longer defines the nature of museum work. Educators, public-relations officers and marketeers play as important a role, a role which is recognised by a professional journal with an international reputation. Responses to Watkins’s article were published in a later issue of the same journal. David Resnicow, a consultant, criticises Watkins for his elitism, while Lisa Roberts, a public programs manager, critiques him for assuming that leisure or recreation and education or learning are intrinsic oppositions.

These critiques are rather obvious ones to make. Of more interest, perhaps, is Watkins’s position in relation to theory, particularly postmodernism. Watkins’s outburst against European intellectuals is not that unusual. Other commentators frequently associate postmodernism with a prevalence for nostalgic presentations of the past, with a lack of public responsibility for passing judgement, with an “anything goes” attitude. Peter Fowler, for example, tries to link what he sees as a theoretical fashion—postmodernism—with the worst aspects of the new heritage industry. It quickly becomes clear that he objects to the playful treatment of the past and its use as a resource to make money in the present. Fowler sarcastically describes postmodernism as an attitude of “take what you want, use it how you will, and make no connection” (58). Fowler then goes on to relate postmodernism and “heritagism,” arguing that both are eclectic and discontinuous, a trait which has detrimental effects on historical significance—that is, on values of authenticity and historical truth.

While I do not want to align myself with Watkins and Fowler, I do find it interesting that “theory” is placed alongside the range of changes which both these critics try to attack. Theory is positioned on the side of the new, unsympathetic to notions of tradition, the value of the object, of experience. The Watkins exchange is interesting because of the way in
which the debate is characterised along a distinct axis and demands that the 
reader take sides, and make a choice. On the one hand, there are those who 
are depicted as conservative and traditionalist, as supporting élite cultural 
values and as opposing the values of cultural diversity. They stand for 
notions of authenticity, for the continued importance of the object, the 
need for curatorial authority, scholarship and the privileged space of culture. 
They are fighting for the values of auratic cultures. On the other hand there 
are the progressives, who stand for cultural diversity, access, the 
compatibility of education through entertainment, the need for museums to 
engage with contemporary popular culture, and particularly with the media. 
Only then, they argue, can museums hope to survive and maintain some 
degree of cultural relevance (see MacDonald “The Museum,” “Change”; 
MacDonald and Silverstone; Weil; Wallace).

Thus, for example, Stephen Weil argues from within the museum world that 
museums need to get away from the idea that their main purpose is the 
collection and preservation of objects. Speaking from a new curatorial 
perspective, he claims that

we have too often taken what is a necessary condition to the work 
of museums—the existence of carefully acquired, well-documented 
and well-cared for collections—and treated that necessary condition 
as if it were a sufficient condition. In developing justifications for 
the public support of museums, we have too often forgotten that 
their ultimate importance must lie not in their ability to acquire and 
care for objects—important as that may be—but in their ability to 
take such objects and put them to some worthwhile use. In our 
failure to recognise this, we run the danger of trivialising both our 
institutions and ourselves. (29)

In highlighting the social purpose of museums, Weil also claims that 
museums should actively seek a space in which discussion of contemporary 
political issues could take place. In doing so, he explicitly aligns himself 
with the movement for a “new museology” (see Vergo), a movement which 
begins by recognising the political nature of museological representations. 
Thus, for example, Weil refers to Robert Julien, a French new museologist, 
as saying that “museums should be engaging themselves more deeply with 
those larger public issues that vitally affect the lives of their communities, 
their countries, or even the future of mankind” (qtd. in Weil 35).

In making the political the centre of museum activity, such questions reflect 
an attempt to construct a newer understanding of museums as articulating 
with, rather than dictating to, their audiences. More often than not, the 
first step in this process is a recognition that the interpretation of objects by 
curators is an exercise of power. Addressing an American Museums 
conference in 1986, Neil Harris pointed out that “classification has come to 
be seen as an act of domination as well as analysis” (qtd. in Weil 51). The 
recognition of the political nature of such an act means that “the museum’s 
voice is no longer seen as transcendent. Rather it is implicated in the 
distribution of wealth, power, knowledge, and taste shaped by the larger 
social order” (Harris, qtd. in Weil 51).
Alongside the setting up of the debate between the valences of progressive and conservative then, we also have another set of binary oppositions being manipulated into place which become a demand to make a choice—a choice which makes it impossible to explore the debate about the heritage industry as anything other than a conservative response to questions of change. This is particularly clear in debates about the roles of objects as evident in the debate around Watkin’s contribution. In this debate, the world of objects is counterpointed to the world of representation; authenticity is positioned against reproduction, essentialism against cultural construction, élitism against the popular, the serious against the lighthearted, the reverent against the irreverent, education against entertainment.

The manipulation of such oppositions for cultural analysis is central to the work of the critical humanities. As MacDonald and Silverstone suggest in their work on the Science Museum in London, the sense of crisis manifested in these debates is expressive of a wider set of concerns: “These concerns—with problems of authenticity, representation and the active demanding reader/viewer/visitor—are central to current discussions in the analysis of other cultural industries” (176-77). However, a problem arises for me when these debates are expressed as a series of mutually exclusive positions. One is either for the object, curatorial authority, authenticity and respect for history, in which case one is labelled as a conservative; or one is for the use of electronic technologies in museums, has no qualms about the loss of auratic experiences, has a cavalier attitude towards history, is a populist and welcomes consumerism with open arms—in which case one is a progressive. Neither side is allowed to see anything of any value in the other.

The problems of having to make such a choice were made very clear to me in the last six months of 1997, while I was curating an exhibition on the Portuguese communities, called Travellers and Immigrants in Perth, for the Community Access Gallery at the Fremantle History Museum. I want to explore these problems around the figure of the object, as it is the museum’s attitude towards objects which seems to be at the centre of a lot of these debates.

Trained as a new museologist, and with a firm belief that museums are engaged in the politics of representation, I began to collect stories from various members of the Portuguese communities. I was careful to make sure I had representation from all of the major groups—since those who identify as Portuguese come not only from Portugal but from Madeira, Angola, Mozambique and even East Timor. One of my aims was to show, through personal stories first, and objects second, that the Portuguese diaspora in Perth could not be identified as a single community. Part of my strategy here was to try and show how the Portuguese diaspora was made up of people who had always “travelled.”

However, it was not always possible to collect stories and use objects as illustrations of them. While my initial idea had been to base the exhibition on a series of oral histories, I found that history, even oral history, was not always an easy point of contact between myself and those who had generously agreed to talk to me. And this was despite the fact that I could conduct these interviews in their own language. I found that some families
were more comfortable grounding their conversations with me in photographs and objects than in questions about why they came, their family history, their experiences as migrants. The problem was not that of a lack of willingness to participate in the exhibition. Rather, the difficulty appeared more to be one of trying to explain the purpose of story-telling in an exhibition. There was a resistance, on the part of some, towards abstraction. In fact, some even said it was enough to have just the objects. What did I want stories for?

On a number of occasions, I arrived in homes to conduct an oral history interview and discuss the possibility of lending objects, after making an appointment by phone and explaining the purpose of the exhibition, to find the entire family assembled to greet me, the television on, and a wish to talk to me within the family group, over coffee and cake. In these situations I never even got the tape recorder out of my bag. The expectations of the situation were just too different. I chose instead to be guided by them, allowing them to show me books, photographs, and ornaments while sharing a coffee and cake. This provided them with an opportunity and the means to reminisce, to remember their home, their village, family associations or even return trips. All the references specified their immediate family or original neighbourhood. The tendency was to be very concrete. This was reflected in their homes, which were cluttered and filled with objects on display shelves and in cabinets. There was a lot of crockery, some which was obviously designed for a tourist market as it contained depictions of various places, while other pieces were more folkloric in style, photographs of family members stretching back to grandparents, flags and other memorabilia of Portuguese origin.

Any attempts to investigate further and get these people to answer questions as to why they came, what the situation was in their home country, how they found Australia on arrival, what structures of support they had and so on, were met with short, noncommittal answers. They were far more interested in reminiscing about their terra (birthplace), or in telling me about particular folkloric customs or ways of cooking food. Discussion of social conditions, politics or economics was resisted.

Most of the people with whom this happened tended to belong to the older wave of migration, particularly from the island of Madeira. While quite a few were financially well-off, owning their own businesses, most were blue-collar workers in either the fishing or food-processing industries. Most had had only a few years of schooling in Madeira, some not even completing primary school.

Of course, I did not have this experience with every family. I did in fact take a number of interesting oral histories which became, in turn, the basis for the catalogue and a CD in the exhibition itself, and which provided many of the conceptual frameworks for the exhibition. But those who were happy to do such interviews tended to be more recent migrants, more highly educated, in managerial and professional jobs. These people were far more prepared to talk about their experiences, were much less reticent and were even prepared to offer their own explanations and comments on the insularity of the older group. Interestingly, their homes were less cluttered and they had fewer "ethnic" objects to offer for the exhibition.
How are we to understand this preference for the concrete, for the specific, for the object? A preference which in the heritage debate is defined as belonging to those who want to preserve the values of connoisseurship, aural culture and authenticity? A preference which is associated with cultural elitism and political conservatism?

One possible answer is to consider an orientation to objects as a means of personal reminiscence as particularly strong in working class culture. This might explain why other ways of making meaning from objects—that of connoisseurship, for example—is associated with the cultural élite. A useful point of comparison for this approach comes from an unlikely quarter—the work of Richard Hoggart in a book called *The Uses of Literacy*, first published in 1957. One of Hoggart’s main aims in this book is to document and describe what he sees as the unique characteristics of the English working class, characteristics which he argued made up a distinct cultural group with its own rationales and ways of making meaning. Of interest in relation to the place of objects in both defining and producing individual and group identity is his insight that “the more we try to reach the core of working-class attitudes, the more surely does it appear that the core is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local; it is embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second, the neighbourhood” (33). He goes on to argue that working-class people do not have the cultural frameworks with which to see the value of abstract thought. In the way he describes it, Hoggart is not judging them as intellectually unable but is, rather, pointing out that abstract thought simply has no use within the way in which they live their lives. As he says,

> they have had little or no training in the handling of ideas or their analysis [. . .] Working-class people are only rarely interested in theories of movements. They do not usually think of their lives as leading to an improvement in status or to some financial goal. They are enormously interested in people: they have the novelist’s fascination with individual behaviour, with relationships—though not so as to put them into a pattern, but for their own sake. (102, 105-106)

A similar point is made by Susan Pearce in her introduction to a book of essays on the place of material culture in western society. She points out a significant difference in the way objects are used in literature produced for an educated readership and in literature produced for a “popular” audience. While “classic literature” focuses on life as it is, providing an analysis of it, “popular” literature is concerned with fantasy worlds—whether thrillers, romances or science fiction. In these fantasy worlds it is objects, rather than people, that move the narrative forward. These novels are also dense with descriptions of interiors and people’s relationships with one another. In other words, despite creating a fantasy, they are deeply empirical in their orientation. “Classic literature,” on the other hand, is moved forward by the nature of people’s characters and social circumstances, in line with its role as social analysis. The material world intrudes only in so far as it forms part of the background against which the characters move the plot forward.

Taken to my experiences with working-class members of the Portuguese community, both these insights would seem to support my recognition that
the refusal to discuss the general was connected to a preference for linking specific discussions of family and place to objects. The objects they offered to lend for the exhibition literally embodied their familial and geographic sense of personal identity. For example, one woman from Madeira offered to lend her best hand-embroidered tablecloth. The tablecloth had been made for her by her mother-in-law and sent to her in Australia by post. Tablecloths are usually made, according to local tradition, by mothers to give to their daughters as part of their wedding-trousseaux. Dona Rosa no longer had her mother, so her mother-in-law took it upon herself to make her a tablecloth at the same time as she was making one for her own daughter, as she felt her daughter-in-law was missing out. In speaking to Dona Rosa, it turns out that what she misses most is the sense of community and family life in Madeira. In Australia, she not only feels displaced and without a family network, but she is actually uncomfortable about going outside the home. The tablecloth was thus a material link to her sense of identity—both to Madeira and to her family.

Another couple lent a number of miniature reproductions of traditional objects such as an iron cooking pot and a wine barrel, as well as a set of coasters depicting various places in Madeira and people in folkloric costume. Of importance to them was the accuracy of the reproduction—this is how these things/places looked. These objects were the basis of our conversation in which they described their "terra" and its traditional ways of life. Again, objects were their means of rooting themselves in a place where they no longer lived and had increasingly fewer relatives. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out, one of the ways in which objects objectify the self is through revealing "the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementoes and souvenirs of the past, and signpost to future goals" (23). They also, he suggests, "give concrete evidence of one's place in a social network as symbols (literally, the joining together) of valued relationships" (23).

Of importance here is the way in which these objects are used to perform or write the history of these people. As many have argued (for instance, Healy; Urry), objects are important props in the process of memory, and memory is intricately linked to the way in which histories are remembered and written, especially the process of reminiscence. Reminiscence is central to the process of identity formation, and it requires props such as objects or places. Furthermore, reminiscence is a process which involves an active element which is more than simply nostalgia for the past. As John Urry argues, it also involves an active, performative element to the process of identity formation. Such a process involves establishing a continuity with the past that is objectified through the continued existence of these objects.

This performative element becomes quite intricate in the case of this exhibition. If objects were used to perform one's identity as a member of a group, who was the audience? At its simplest level, the audience were both members of the Portuguese community who could, through the display of objects, perform their membership of the group to one another and total strangers—tourists and other Australians. But, at another level, they were also being used to define boundaries within the community itself. So, for example, in the comment book, a member of the Madeirense community
remarks on how nice it is to see so many objects from Madeira. Another points out that the first immigrants suffered a lot in comparison to the more recent arrivals from continental Portugal, who only complain and don’t know what real hardship is. Objects, then, were used to define difference within the community, between it and the outside as well as to establish sameness.

The work of another earlier critic is also useful in exploring this relationship between objects, identity and performance. As Hannah Arendt argues, at about the same time as Hoggart was pointing out the importance of the specific and the concrete to working-class culture:

Things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that [. . .] men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world [. . .] Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity. (Arendt, qtd. in Csikszentmihalyi 23)

Despite the datedness of the language, there are some interesting points here. Identity is related not to difference but to sameness. And sameness is related to continuity, a notion which Walter Benjamin had already pointed out as intrinsically linked with notions of the material world. These ideas provide an interesting counterpoint to the present-day discussion of identity in terms of difference. It appears that, while community galleries may have been established to provide a space in which cultural difference can be safely produced for public exhibition, thus contributing to a notion of cultural diversity, this notion of diversity may be more a function of the public role of community galleries as part of a museum complex rather than fulfilling a need amongst members of the community themselves to be seen as different. In the case of migrants, objects establish continuities or sameness within their own family and friends. They are the point of stability, in a context where everything else is in flux. In Arendt’s terminology, they provide objectivity. To ask these people to reflect on their migrant experience, however, is to ask them to describe their difference, to specify their ethnicity—in Arendt’s terminology, it is to focus on their subjectivity.

Yet a focus on subjectivity does not require objects. This was amply demonstrated in the process of making the exhibition by the fact that those who could transcend their immediate position and articulate their experiences to wider historical contexts were familiar with the idea of oral history, but, conversely, did not attach such importance to objects. We could argue that when subjectivity is attached to objects, the result is what Michael Ettema has called the “formalist perspective” in museums. This is the traditional approach to objects whereby objects are made to stand for wider social characteristics such as morality, degree of technological advancement, quality of culture and so on, through such categories as taste. This process, as many critics have pointed out, is political, and more often than not imposes the tastes and values of a cultural elite on other groups.
This means that the "objectivity" of the objects in the exhibition I have been discussing is not the same objectivity which is criticised by the new museologists in their attack on traditional museum practices. The latter involves turning the objectivity of objects into a subjectivity via the rationale of various museum practices—collecting, cataloging, classifying—all of which require not only a level of abstraction but also involve an inevitable process of othering. The former, however, stops at recognising Arendt's objectivity of the objects. Thus the objects within the community I have been discussing are important not because they reflect innate aesthetic moral or technological characteristics, but because they are anchors for personal and family histories.

This tension between objectivity and subjectivity, sameness and difference, concrete and abstract, object and idea is reflected in the structure of the exhibition itself. As a professional curator attempting to mediate not only between the museum and the community, but also among the needs of different sections of the community, I implicitly recognised that I needed to provide a space in which this personal, concrete and familial approach to objects could be represented and, at the same time, also explain, to both the community themselves as well as a non-Portuguese audience, the different experiences of groups within the community, and provide some sort of historical context. Another way of putting the problem is to ask in what ways the exhibition negotiated private stories with the need to tell them in a public space with a mission to educate.

The answer, of course, is that it ended up being a hybrid exhibition. The more abstract aspects which provided the historical context were guided by themes such as reason for coming, religious practices, working life, and the history of Portugal and its empire. This aspect of the exhibition had to be portrayed mostly by photographs, use of media articles and interpretative labels. It was based on both archival research and oral history. The theme of continuity and cultural tradition, however, was based on objects and a solid personal perspective.

What this example shows is that museums are contact zones among different cultures—those of public institutions and private groups, official culture and popular culture, as well as among different groups within the community itself. To the extent that popular culture involves non-élite groups, this also translates into a need to do some cultural translation. In the example of Travellers and Immigrants, this translation work was done by including an approach to objects which did not abstract from them, but at the same time found other media by which to provide the historical context and explanatory frameworks. The approach taken was thus one which did not equate objects with either conservatism or with representation. Instead, it began by recognising that there are various ways of understanding and using objects, and that not all of them need to imply the museum in processes of othering.

To conclude: Travellers and Immigrants was an exhibition which highlighted the inadequacies of the way in which the heritage debate has been conducted, because it illustrates the limits of functioning discussion through binary oppositions that demand a choice. Such debates tend to use universalist categories which inevitably oversimplify. But there are wider implications.
beyond the narrow confines of the heritage debate itself. For the form of
this debate owes much to the legacy of a critical humanities which, in its
attempt to leave behind the charges of humanism and essentialism, has
become itself a little too dogmatic. It is not as easy as choosing between a
belief in objectivity or cultural construction, essentialism or representation,
conservatism or progressivism, elitism or democracy. A more complex
view of "traditional" cultural texts such as exhibitions, more attention to
differences within communities, including those of class, respect for
materialist as well as abstract forms of knowledge production and a
reappraisal of the possibilities offered by notions of tradition, could enable a
more constructive dialogue in the humanities in general.

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Celtic Survivals: Gendering the Nation in Michael Collins

Margaret Macintyre

Critics have argued that, in the late twentieth century, some countries are entering a postnational condition. However, in the so-called developing world and, as the international community has learnt to its cost, even in Europe, nationalism appears as to be modernity’s unfinished project, or, as others would assert, the return of the pre-modern in lethal guise (see Gandhi 102-21). The painful process of decolonisation and the resurgence or re-invention of sometimes fanatical nationalisms leads Kristeva to call for “nations without nationalism” (x), while Declan Kiberd states emphatically in the Preface to his Inventing Ireland that

The century which is about to end is once again dominated by the debate with which it began: how to distinguish what is good in nationalism from what is bad, and how to use the positive potentials to assist peoples to modernize in a humane fashion. (7)

Kiberd’s controversial recent book is part of the continuous scrutiny of specifically Irish nationalist discourses since the 60s—an urge to discover less Manichean, less exclusionary versions of Irish identity and to come to terms with the complexity and trauma of Ireland’s history within the context of its new economic and cultural self-confidence. At the close of the twentieth century, Ireland requires, so critics argue, a sustained and nuanced reassessment of identity, nationalism and history and their complex interconnections, as well as a debate about the relevance (or irrelevance) of these cultural categories for Ireland’s future.¹

Contemporary Irish cinema, itself a product of a greater cultural self-assurance, is part of a public sphere where these issues are engaged, and therefore recent films demand critical examination of the constructions of Irish history and identity they put into circulation. Michael Collins, since it deals with a painful and often disavowed episode in modern Irish

¹ Bruce Stewart, for example, in “Inside Nationalism: A Meditation Upon Inventing Ireland,” scathingly dismisses Kiberd’s brand of cultural nationalism as “obscure, narrow, and [a misrepresentation of] [. . .] the actual experience of living in modern Ireland” (5). He argues for a post-nationalism that will free Ireland from an obsessive concern with national identity (15).
history—the Civil War—and has created predictable controversies about distortion and inaccuracy, is a film that repays detailed examination, regardless of its intrinsic merits. One of the more astute reviewers of Michael Collins observes that the film “has become an historical artefact in its own right” (Newey 20) because its reception is framed by recent events in the peace process. But it is also an historical artefact in another sense, registering the attractive pull of certain standardised accounts of Irish history and identity which Neil Jordan, its writer and director and therefore in one light its “onlie begetter,” finds irresistible.

Of course, it is possible to argue that Michael Collins is an Irish film solely in the way Braveheart is a Scottish one. Jordan has moved from the local film industry to Hollywood, and the movie, financed by Warner Brothers, is a bio/epic big-screen vehicle sold to an international audience, with all that follows. For example, the choice of the feeble Julia Roberts as the compulsory love interest looks like shrewd commercial calculation rather than unfettered artistic decision. However, the project was a long-time enthusiasm of Jordan’s, who, in the film diary that pretentiously accompanies the screenplay, makes large claims for his film’s seriousness of purpose and its cold-eyed look at political violence. He states that he wishes to avoid mythologising Collins by refusing to locate him in the outworn narratives of martyrdom and tragedy through which Irish history is made intelligible even to its participants (Eagleton 247). At the same time, he wants to give Collins’ story the effect of total immediacy, and by implication he contrasts his own imaginative reconstruction of events, presumably felt in the heart and along the blood, with historians’ sterile formulations (Jordan, Film Diary 63). His desire to tell the tale from the point of view of the participants (as he declares in the Diary) supposedly brings history to the bar of lived experience and brute reality, creating in Collins a figure bestriding the period like a colossus, yet vulnerable to the same painful relativities that govern Irish history today.

But though one may sympathise with the view that history is messier on the ground and needs to be reanimated in the cinema, Jordan remains trapped in overdetermined representations of Irish history and identity that he affects to repudiate—symbolic patterns and narratives that reproduce rather than interrogate founding mythologies that have served and continue to serve Ireland only too well.

This is nowhere more evident than in the film’s gendering of the nation. I am assuming, as do the editors of Nationalisms and Sexualities, first, that nation and sexuality are not “discrete and autonomous constructs” (Parker et al. 2) and, second, that nations are notgendered in identical ways. The Playboy Riots early in the century, partly provoked by supposed insults to Irish womanhood, stung Yeats to a reply in which he castigated the patriotic constructions of woman as “unreal” fantasies, products of a “petrified nationalism” (qtd. in Harris 475). In Ireland, woman had come to embody the nation as chaste emblem, sometimes menaced by the colonial oppressor, in other incarnations the virginal bride/goddess for whom the patriot renounces worldly interest in a wilful gesture of self-sacrifice. Ironically, Yeats had cannily reproduced just such an image in Cathleen ni Houlihan, which traded on the ancient folk image of the Poor Old Woman
miraculously transformed into a queen once the young man has dedicated himself to her harsh but perfect service. As Susan Harris argues, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* forms part of a tradition of nineteenth-century nationalist melodrama which Yeats appropriated but later came to question. It may seem perverse but is perhaps not altogether wrong-headed to regard *Michael Collins* as a late twentieth-century addition to this genre (although the film is multi-generic), especially as Shepherd and Womack argue in *English Drama: A Cultural History* that the conventions of melodrama are persistent, calling melodrama the undead of dominant culture (248).

What is undeniable is that Kitty Kiernan (Collins’ fiancée), played by Julia Roberts, may resemble the token, marginalised woman demanded by commercial backers, but she also uncannily replicates women’s position in the Irish state and the national imaginary. Thus she is not, alas, dispensable, since she is iconographically central to the Boyo’s Own Story Jordan relates. However, in this “male-bonding drama of Oedipal revolutionaries,” a phrase I have borrowed from Linda Kintz (7), the eroticising of the nation is also its homoeroticising. Thus in *Michael Collins* the film must secure the differences between masculinity and femininity essential to national (en)genderings, while countering the ever-present threat of male homosexuality in the “virile fraternity” (Parker et al. 6).

What is clear is that accounts of the Irish revolution attempt to contain the threat of the feminine by emphasising male bonding, homosociality and the Logic of the Same. As Kintz remarks: “nationalist movements of the twentieth century [...] privilege purity and Oneness: One privileged gender, One form of sexual orientation, One race, One nation” (98). At the same time, as will become clear, this logic still permits woman’s insertion into the narrative, according her a symbolic position that allows her to embody the nation without disturbing men’s dominance as active revolutionaries and political subjects. It was the kind of logic that made it very difficult for women political activists at the turn of the century in Ireland, who risked their lives to campaign for freedom and justice, to be taken seriously by their male colleagues. For example, Yeats sees Maud Gonne, in Eagleton’s words, as “rose of Ireland and rancorous demagogue” (234), while Constance Markiewicz is transformed either into an Amazonian, androgynous figure or a batty old woman.

*Michael Collins* exactly reproduces this masculine exclusionary logic in its narrative, despite critics’ calls for fresh methods of dealing with external and internal difference in contemporary Ireland. The Anglo-Irish war is represented as the work of a sacred band prepared to risk everything for Ireland, while the Civil War becomes an Oedipal struggle for power and legitimacy that rends the nation’s unity. This catastrophe demands the death of the protagonist as saviour of and sacrifice to the nation, enrolling him in the ancestral list of Irish martyrs who are both Ireland’s favoured sons and its founding fathers.

However, in stories of nationalist genealogy and the construction of Freudian family trees, sons, brothers and fathers occupy ambivalent and contested positions, and *Michael Collins* is no exception. Stephen Tift notes that the famous Playboy Riots of 1907 were not only about sexual hysteria but also about parricidal fantasy, a comically excessive but thwarted
rebellion against the father, in Synge’s case not the British occupying power but, more disastrously, the father of hearth and home (315). In the film, Collins as revolutionary son is betrayed during the post-Treaty conflict by his revolutionary “father” (and Ireland’s father) De Valera, and by his son/brother/disciple Harry Boland. *Et tu Brute!* De Valera, depicted as cold, puritanical and Machiavellian, in contrast to the warm generosity of Neeson’s portrayal, abandons Collins for the sake of a pure and seemingly unachievable republican ideal of national unity and complete independence from Britain. Harry Boland, his younger brother-in-arms and loyal follower, deserts to Collins’s opponents and is killed in the Liffey, hauled out of the water and hung up in a parody of crucifixion while Collins grieves over his body. The feuds that destroy the fragile nation are thus all in the family, the product of an intense male bonding and masculine rivalry where love and betrayal occupy the same intimate, claustrophobic and Biblical space.

The revolution as quasi-Passion Play reminds us irresistibly of that perverse version of Irish nationalism that attracted Pearse, a cult of blood sacrifice that made dying for Ireland a holy and redemptive act wherein the dead express the nation whole and entire through their violated bodies. In his diary Jordan will have no truck with this old-fashioned attitude, but the film’s climax, in which Collins is slain by a single bullet, his dead body cradled in the arms of a faithful follower (a reversal of Harry’s death scene), gives the iconographic lie to this denial. The tearing of the body politic begins the true inauguration and healing of the nation, Collins’s death both individual and communal. And De Valera, the nation’s true/false father, must do penance for his role in shedding of its blood, which he does in the on-screen legend above archival shots of Collins’ funeral (not included in the published screenplay):

> It’s my considered opinion that in the fullness of time history will record the greatness of Collins and it will be recorded at my expense.

The inclusion of the Long Fella’s grudging and belated tribute transforms Collins retrospectively from traitor to the republic to its loyal offspring, and, of course, Ireland must in death gather her sons to herself.

The masculine Pietà formed by the tableau of Collins’s slaying is reinforced two scenes later by the shot of Kitty lying in bed overcome by grief, a combination of *Mater Dolorosa* and Cathleen ni Houlihan left to mourn, but certain of the sacrifice’s meaning (as Joe Reilly says to camera in this scene, “He knew the risks he was taking [. . .]. He took them for us, Kitty, for every gobshite in the country [. . .]”). In the masculine drama of revolution and the inscription of male history, there are no Daughters of the Revolution. Nevertheless, Kitty Kiernan is the woman “translated,” in Jonathan Goldberg’s words, “into a trope of ideal femininity” (63) who represents a spiritualised image of Ireland for whom one fights and dies, and, in the guise of a fleshly but not too fleshly woman, the guarantor of a normative sexuality that counters the threat of “improper” male relations.

Thus Kitty Kiernan, for all the banality of her role in this historical melodrama-cum-epic, must be understood within the context of the anxious and complex negotiations around masculinity and femininity in Irish nationalist discourses. Jordan neglects what seems like a marvellous
cinematic opportunity when he omits the Treaty discussions and thus the
rumours of Collins as revolutionary Don Juan. According to some, Collins
was the sexual success of the London season, convincing proof that radical
chic did not begin with the Black Panthers. Hints of epic philandering
certainly reassure us that Collins was a real man, and would probably earn
him the reluctant admiration of male and female viewers alike. But Jordan
concentrates on the relationship with Kitty, a relationship, as Newey
dismissively puts it, “almost Jesuitically chaste” (20), which defines the
terms of revolutionary dedication and austerity. Kitty’s name, along with
that of the only other significant woman in the film, the maid Rosie,
together symbolise Ireland—Cathleen ni Houlihan and Dark Rosaleen—and
to betray Kitty would be, by extension, to betray Ireland.

We must therefore examine the Collins-Kitty romance in the context of the
genderings of the nation specific to Irish nationalism, on the grounds that
nationalisms are neither transhistorical nor transcultural, although for most
audiences the relationship depicted in the film is perfectly readable according
to Hollywood formulae.

Since the eighteenth century, Ireland, depicted as dark-haired Erin or fair-
haired Hibernia, has traced its ancestry back to the sovereign Goddess of
Celtic mythology, later fused with the image of the Virgin Mary and the
sky-woman of the aisling poem, the beautiful Cathleen or Rosaleen (C. L.
Innes 9). She also appears in other guises as nurturing mother and/or poor
old woman. She is thus by turns virginal object of desire, warrior queen,
deity, crone, and keeper of the hearth. Whatever her transformations,
however, as Johnson and Cairns tell us, woman is an allegory of the nation
that allows the Irish to express disguised longings for freedom (5), in one
inflection the Romantic joining of the erotic and nationalistic, echoed in the
film by the motif of the red rose—the rose upon the rood of time. Nineteen
sixteen has been constructed in national memory in these terms and Yeats
himself worried whether if, by penning Cathleen ni Houlihan, he had not
sent young men to their deaths.

Against ennobling allegorical images of Ireland as woman in national
discourses, we have the nineteenth-century English view of the Celts as
essentially feminine in nature, as befits an inferior race (C. L. Innes 9). The
rise of pseudo-scientific racial discourses at this time had mixed but generally
incapacitating results for the Irish. They were depicted as childlike,
irrational and lacking in masculine self-control, and therefore in need of the
smack of firm government and the order and restraint of colonial power. Or
they were, more benignly, regarded as poetic, instinctual and emotional,
feminine qualities that complemented and completed the English character
but did not endanger English rule. In either case, while the Irish could trade
on their image as drunk on words and whisky and wedded to unrealities, the
Irish (and this meant Irish men) needed to recover and assert their
masculinity in the face of those who would dismiss their fervour and
intensity as the “childish heat, the blind hysterics of the Celt” (Michael
Innes 57). But when Irish violence became troublesome, the Irish were not
simply examples of the uncontrolled (feminine) body, as in the hysterical, but
Fenian beasts, Frankenstein’s monsters which Britain had in a sense
“fathered” without maternal agency and which needed to be destroyed.
Ironically, resistance to the father/oppressor was not always depicted as a threat to England, the masculine, but to Ireland herself, pictured as the virtuous, endangered woman familiar from melodrama, who remained at the mercy of fiends that grossly desired her.

The generation of 1916 negotiated these complex relationships between disabling femininity and monstrous, unnatural masculinity, first, by affirming their virility (the masculine Gael in them rather than the feminine Celt)—explaining the statue of Cuchulain now at the General Post Office—and, second, by depicting Irish patriots as martyrs dying for an idealised, chaste Ireland while simultaneously occupying the position of the feminised, passive, suffering victim, targets rather than perpetrators of violence.

Jordan manages the mutual implications of sexuality and nationality along these by now familiar and familial lines, despite his disclaimers. Collins’s use of brutal terrorist tactics is cleverly presented so that he attracts some of the Romantic glamour of the Celtic hero, while his early death, clearly the work of his enemies and of his own reckless generosity of spirit, locates him as the victim/scapegoat. Liam Neeson, who turns in a fiery performance as the Big Fella, leaves the audience little emotional choice but to side with Collins, whatever his individual acts, and to read his death as a predestined Golgotha that absolves him of violence committed in his name.

Thus Collins seems comfortably to occupy the masculine/feminine positions of hero and victim nationalist mythology decrees. However, categories have a way of refusing to stay in place, and the triangulated relationships the narrative establishes in order to secure heterosexuality yet privilege revolutionary blood brotherhood flirt with the danger of subverting clear distinctions. Onto the Oedipal triangle De Valera–Collins–Harry Boland Jordan maps another that unsettles it: Harry–Kitty–Collins.

In the first triangle, Dev is the stern and irascible father, the Lucius Junius Brutus of republican virtue whose fanaticism fragments the nation he has gained and who is willing to sacrifice Ireland’s sons for his goal. Collins is forced to oppose him, thus compelling Harry, Collins’s beloved “son” and disciple, to choose between them. Harry is played by Aidan Quinn, a much slighter, more feminine-looking actor than Neeson, while Neeson is the embodiment of a proper masculinity, in contrast to Dev’s monkish Puritanism and Harry’s less commanding presence—tall, bluff, humorous, down-to-earth, at once tough yet tender, stoical, yet sensitive to suffering.

Although Harry and Kitty are at first romantically linked, it is clear that he cannot and will not get the girl. Kitty is entranced by the more remote and charismatic Collins who, of course, struggles against entanglement because of his revolutionary vocation. If Kitty incarnates Ireland as a dark-haired fragile beauty, she is both the object for which one renounces the pleasures of everyday life and yet the romantic distraction seeking to draw one back into them. The film manages to have it both ways. Kitty’s relationship with Collins is idealised and consummated only in death. She is neither a passing amusement nor a threat to Collins’s real business, saving Ireland, but a measure of his dedication.
She also comes to represent the split occasioned by the Civil War, insisting that she loves both Harry and Michael (though in different ways, of course). There is almost a suggestion of a romantic and quasi-incestuous threesome about their relationship as the two men, revolutionary brothers-in-arms, playfully compete with each other and yet defer to each other's claims, as if the only possible solution were for her to belong to both of them (as a method of healing the divisions in the young state).

Michael and Harry, joined in the love of one woman and one nation (however fatally at war with itself), are also joined by a bond that seems almost homoerotic. The hidden sensuality that, as Sedgwick tells us in *The Epistemology of the Closet*, often informs the homosocial and may invest the figures of Christ with an ambiguous eroticism (140, 142) is present in the Collins/Harry Boland tie. They wrestle playfully together in the bed they often, of necessity, share, and it is clear that Harry loves Collins and vice versa. At one point, when the two see a bride arriving at a railway station, Collins banteringly remarks: "Maybe we should settle down," and Harry replies: "Just the two of us." In another scene the screenplay states: "Collins grips Boland's head close to his like a woman's" (149). The film proves once again the force of Sedgwick's thesis (initially derived from René Girard) that it is the relationships between men that matter:

What is most interesting for our purpose in [Girard's] study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the one that links either of the two rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of "rivalry" and "love," differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many cases equivalent. (*Between Men* 21)

Thus Kitty draws the two comrades closer together even as she drives them apart, providing them with an alibi to express the tender feelings they have for each other while becoming a symbol of their political divisions.

It is therefore sometimes hard to tell who is in love with whom: Kitty with Michael and Harry; Michael with Harry and Kitty; and Harry with Kitty and Michael. Collins's hypermasculinity is, of course, supposed to guarantee that we will not "misread" these relationships and that a heterosexual logic will remain in place.

But loving Kitty/loving Ireland/loving each other proves fatal for both men. This presumably is the price Ireland exacts, and the intimate association of love and death is persistent in the film, as it is in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. In an early encounter, Collins questions Kitty about her origins, but she refuses to answer. She is a mysterious figure who, like Cathleen, comes from nowhere. That night she sings a traditional Irish melody about a fatal wedding ("she's a voice like an angel," exclaims Collins), a melody that recurs at the end when Kitty shops for her wedding gown. Next morning Harry and Collins are lying together in bed when she enters, and Collins jokingly proposes, though he admits it is not easy "with a Fenian in your bed," poking fun at the symbolic wedding between dark Erin and the Fenian beast.

Beds recur in the film, though nothing improper happens on them or in them (even if we are teased with erotic possibilities), because Ireland must be
protected from non-normative and extra-marital sexuality, and perhaps from sex itself (as a newly-independent Ireland set out to do with the help of the Catholic Church). A chaste Ireland is contrasted with the degraded images of imperial womanhood. Dev is forced to dress as a tart when he is sprung from Lincoln gaol ("There are certain things one shouldn’t do for one’s country," he dryly remarks), and the shooting of an English agent takes place while he is in bed with a prostitute. One fornicates for England and empire, but one dies for Ireland.

There is, however, a disturbing scene in which Kitty and Collins are alone in a hotel room and the boys are out “delivering flowers,” code for a killing mission—an uneasy juxtaposition of eros and thanatos. The scenes of Collins’s last hours are intercut with Kitty’s trousseau-buying. She is trying on wedding finery, her image fixed and doubled in the mirror: fragile features, dark hair, white, nun-like veil, floral coronet on her brow—the bride/sacrifice adorned, Iphigeneia-like, not for her husband but for death. The news of Collins’s assassination is brought to her in the shop, this Death-and-the-Maiden scenario providing narrative and symbolic closure. Like other martyrs, Collins is “married” to Ireland, leaving Ireland to mourn for the dead hero in the person of Kitty, alias Cathleen.

Jordan has had two other attempts at exploring Irish politics: Angel and The Crying Game. In the former, he explores the sources and consequences of violence in Irish national life, though his aesthetic strategies, as Hill argues, empty the film of any political or historical explanations for that violence (180). In the latter, his apparently modish gender politics gained the film an international audience, but Risked suggesting that the Maud Gonne and Constance Markieviczes, the Harpies of the Revolution, had come back to haunt us. The good girl/bad girl scenario, resembling a nationalist version of Fatal Attraction, came within a whisker of hinting that Ireland’s recent troubles were woman’s trouble, as Miranda Richardson, a specialist in femmes fatales, is gunned down in the penultimate scene when she embarks on a final act of murderous violence. The film engenders the nation with a vengeance. Presumably audiences need the corrective of the Kitty Kiernans to restore a true notion of Irish womanhood and its purely supplementary, though iconographically crucial, role in nationalism.

There is also an interesting generational issue at work in Michael Collins. The difference between heroic past and violent, unresolved present is signalled by gender disturbance. In a rerun of High Noon, Kitty stands by her man when he is attacked (she fires a gun into the air at a rowdy meeting), but as a woman she knows her properly appointed place in the national struggle. In The Crying Game, Miranda Richardson seduces an off-duty British soldier in order to kidnap him and then proves more pathologically violent than her male IRA colleagues. There is thus a curious symbolic equation between post-70s IRA terrorism and the subversion of traditional gender roles.

In Michael Collins the masculine body of the nation on which the film lingers must, in a familiar gesture, expel its Others—the homosexual and the woman—while declaring woman to be constitutive of the nation. The small scene in which Dev is forced to dress as a tart thus takes on additional significance since we are invited to laugh at his brief assumption of two alien
identities—the drag queen and the woman—without being in the least threatened by their conjunction with “Irishness,” since being Irish can never mean being feminine and/or queer.

However, in The Crying Game, the transvestite coloured Englishman (Dil, not Dev), an infinitely desirable though stigmatised Other, and the black squaddie, Jody, who loves “her,” appear to unsettle the binaries that once constituted the British empire: black/white, masculine/feminine. Jody leaves behind a set of cricket whites, symbol of a quintessential Englishness that signals his uneasy relationship to the nation that now reluctantly accepts him and sends him out to fight in a “dirty” war (“Cricket is a black man’s game,” asserts Jody, “but here [England] it’s a toff’s game”). Dil is, for all “her” brilliantly deceptive performance of femininity, a true woman in her desire for romance and her impulse to nurture, even if/because those desires are frustrated. Fergus, who renounces the IRA and flees to London after Jody is killed, seeks out Dil in the aptly named Metro Bar, and thus encounters forms of difference that are not rigidly Irish/English. This is meant to be a transformative experience—sharing the same “woman” with Jody, doing penance for Jody’s ugly death. Miranda Richardson, by contrast, activates English fears as old as Edmund Spenser that the seductive Irishwoman will “unman” the English in an act of colonial miscegenation and revenge when she lures the soldier into the clutches of the IRA (see Jones and Stallybrass 162).

Fergus, the IRA operative played by Stephen Rea, comes to repudiate this Irish version of the monstrous feminine in favour of the English domesticated “woman.” Dil, whose seen/unseen, avowed/disavowed penis is “less terrible [. . .] than the fear of castration embodied in woman” (Simpson 174), uses Fergus’s own gun to eliminate the phallicised woman. Consequently, The Crying Game remains trapped, like Michael Collins, in a conservative gender politics that has men loving men—Fergus, who tries to save the squaddie and seeks Dil as Jody’s substitute while becoming Jody’s substitute in Dil’s affections. In this act of penance that unites Fergus with his victims and symbolises his renunciation of violence for political ends, the woman is once again eliminated and yet central to the stability of the family and the nation (re)constituted from the remnants of empire.

The Crying Game thus stands in the hoary tradition of Odd Man Out (1947): centralising the figure of the IRA man who repudiates violence and testifies to its futility. However, as with Jordan’s earlier film Angel, which erases the historical contexts of violence in favour of mystificatory explanations of its roots in the human psyche or the Irish character, The Crying Game avoids political analyses of violence, transforming the hero/villain into passive victim rather than historical agent. The mess that has been Northern Ireland for the last 30 years is thus reduced to atavistic tribal conflicts, ancient and apparently ineradicable hatreds supposedly resistant to the currents of modernity—rendering the “troubles,” as Hill puts it, “unintelligible” (qtd. in Rocket et al. 80) and identifying the Irish problem as pre-modern and thus inhospitable to contemporary historical analysis (see Gandhi 106).

Yet Michael Collins privileges an “heroic” phase of nationalist struggle that contrasts, seemingly, with the hatreds of the distant past and the violent
present, where communal bloodletting is divorced from realistic political goals. In the light of Ireland’s recent history, Michael Collins comfortably suggests that, when it comes to the link between nationhood and masculinity, the older generation of Irish freedom fighters possessed an idealism that made brutality and terrorism simply the necessary means to a noble end. They constitute an example of the “deep fraternal comradeship” that, according to Anderson (16), is the way nations are primarily imagined. Because of the Civil War and the internecine violence it released, the new generation of recruits, young and innocent though they appear, represent a phase of increasing and mindless brutality. At one point Harry saves Collins from the murderous rage of a young follower who wishes to shoot him as an enemy of the republic. When Jordan stages his largely fictional account of Collins’s death, the handsome, innocent-looking young killer is described in the screenplay as blank-eyed and without remorse, a Tom Cruise turned septic. This is the Ireland of the future we find in The Crying Game, and Jordan is careful to distinguish between a masculinity that is capable of warmth, feeling, and human weakness, and its mutation into a race of apathic killers. Thus Jordan adroitly absolves Collins of any guilt for his brilliant invention of terrorist tactics while explaining, though not condoning, the current IRA as the damaged products of a long and damaged history.

Key Irish cultural theorists such as David Lloyd, Declan Kiberd and Richard Kearney have felt the need to scrutinise the nation’s most cherished pieties, those counter-discourses that became dominant in the national imaginary, acknowledging the necessity both for remembering and forgetting by “projecting future images of liberation drawn from the past,” to quote Kearney (xx). Irish north and south of the border need to interrogate the symbolic logics that have governed their views of the past and thus to some extent may constrain their future. These include national engenderings that marginalise and devalue women and idealise forms of male bonding, with the effect of perpetuating cycles of violence in both communities, who share their misogyny if nothing else.

Jordan wishes to tell an unexceptionable story of a nativist rebellion against oppression, part of the grand modernist narrative of emancipation that audiences are increasingly willing to hear. At the same time he must insulate himself against the charge of supporting terrorism (which would have scuppered his movie from the start) and many of the film’s strategies are explained by this tense negotiation between past and present. Ironically, in his passionate ambition to make a definitive statement, Jordan sees historians as his major and most irritating critics, ready to pounce on inaccuracies and condemn artistic licence. However, it is not historians he

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1 Jordan’s inconclusive radio interview with Roy Foster, the distinguished historian, is described in the Diary. Predictably, similar controversies embroiled Jim Sheridan’s In the Name of the Father, the fictionalised account of the Birmingham Six. Sheridan mounted a similar defence of its historical inaccuracies: like Michael Collins his film was sold as a “true” story—he central figure gave interviews as part of the film’s promotion—yet the liberties Sheridan took were explained as necessary aesthetic decisions and therefore presumably immune to criticism.
should be worried about, but rather his own limited, limited and wholly
derivative ways of imagining and gendering Ireland's history.

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Playing with Fire: The Combustion of Gender and Surrealism in Angela Carter’s *The Sadeian Woman*

Jane Southwell

History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts.

(Emma Goldman)

Of Carter’s published texts *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* has attracted the greatest notoriety. A contradictory and paradoxical text, it remains a contentious discussion of some of the Marquis de Sade’s works as well as a dialectically framed analysis of what it means for women to be Justines or Juliettes in late twentieth-century western cultures. Marina Warner reads it as “a controversial essay” which “found in Sade a paradoxical champion of women’s sexual liberation” (195). Certainly, Carter argues for Sade’s writings to be appropriated on behalf of women, but her uses of them are problematic. Not only is Carter’s choice of Sade apparently in ideological opposition to her ardently held feminist beliefs, but also there are ideological paradoxes which are evident in stylistic shifts between the distanced ironical tone and the occasionally prurient recounting of the activities of Sade’s fictional characters.

Why Sade? Sade had been imprisoned for actual mistreatment of women and was the writer of grossly misogynistic novels. Although he might be championed as a “terrorist of the imagination” (Carter, Sadeian Women 22),

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1 From the postscript to Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* (151). All further references will be to this edition. For the complete text by Emma Goldman see “The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation” in *Red Emma Speaks*.

2 See especially Clark; Duncker; Dworkin; Gubar; Jordan, “Dangers”; Jordan, “Dangerous”; Kappeler; Punter; Sage; Warner. The most recent critique is Keenan’s “Angela Carter’s* The Sadeian Woman: Feminism as Treason.” Keenan also reads Carter as “contradictory” and “extend[ing] the limits of feminist thought” (146).

3 Lorna Sage notes this paradox when she says that *The Sadeian Woman* “was the outcome of her idiosyncratic mix of ironic utopianism and militant materialism” (Introduction, *Flesh and the Mirror* 11).

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surely he was not a subject to appropriate "in the service of women" (3). Yet Carter justifies her subject matter because:

He was unusual in this period for claiming rights of free sexuality for women, and in installing women as beings of power in his imaginary worlds. This sets him apart from all other pornographers at all times and most other writers of his period. (36)

It is not just a fascination with the early Romantics which determines this choice, but the wish to hold a mirror up to contemporary women in order that changes might occur. For immediately following the above quotation, Carter says that "In the looking-glass of Sade's misanthropy, women may see themselves as they have been and it is an uncomfortable sight" (36). I wish to argue that Carter's writing of The Sadeian Woman is motivated by a desire to remove the mythological veil from "romantic" heterosexual relationships in order to generate sufficient anger for women to change unequal bases of power. That the outcome is fraught with inconsistencies and dubious ironical distancing does not, I believe, alter the critical impulse of the project.

The choice of Sade (rather than other early Romantics such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Carter's much-beloved William Blake) to ground an argument for revolutionary sexuality can principally be explained as arising from a strong debt to surrealist aesthetics. For the surrealists, Sade represented a revolutionary who was an activist for both political and sexual revolution. Helena Lewis argues that the surrealists were not interested in Sade's sexual perversity but rather "they simply admired him as a rebel against all the conventions" (71).¹ He entered their artistic realm as an icon when Man Ray produced an Imaginary Portrait of D. A. F. Sade in 1938. He was depicted as a monument breaking out of imprisoning bricks while looking towards the storming of the Bastille.²

In Compulsive Beauty Hal Foster argues that Sade was "recovered" by the surrealists and that "Enthusiasm for Sade cut across all factions" (226 n. 45). While of great fascination to the surrealists, Sade's exploration of the psychic interconnectedness of sexuality and death necessarily represents women as the objects of experimentation in his search for the limits of masculine subjectivity through the application of pain. Women are objectified in order to act as displacements of masculine anxiety, as signifiers of the fearful potential dangers of castration. Foster argues that

Such sadism cannot be excused, but neither should it be dismissed, for Freud not only derives it from masochism as a projection of the death drive, but also situates it at the origin of sexuality. And it is fundamental to surrealism, perhaps evident in its very mandate, in painting, collage, and assemblages alike, to destroy the object as

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¹ She quotes Paul Eluard's view that "For having wanted to give back to civilized man [sic] the force of his primitive instincts, for having wanted to free the amorous imagination, and for having struggled for absolute justice and equality, the Marquis de Sade was shut up in the Bastille, in Vincennes, and in Charenton for almost all of his life" (71).
² For comment on this image, see also Ted Gott, "Lips of Coral."
such. Typically directed at figures of woman, this sadism is often compounded with a "punishment" exacted for her putative castration—more precisely, for her projected representation of this state, of its threat to the patriarchal subject. In this respect surrealist images must be subjected to feminist critique. However, it should be remembered that these are representations (whose performativity is open to debate); that they are often ambiguously reflexive about male fantasies, not merely expressive of them; and that the subject positions of these fantasies are more slippery than they first seem. It should also be recalled that underneath this sadism lies a masochism, extreme in certain works (e.g., the *poupées* of Hans Bellmer) but operative throughout surrealism. (13)

Foster's argument is persuasive. It is indeed a valid critical stance to point to the reading of surrealist texts as representations of the fluidity of subject positions for male artists. It also may well be that male artists were displacing onto women their fears of adopting stereotypically masochistic feminine positions and the subsequent social emasculation which might follow. What cannot be elided, however, is that it is women's bodies which are acted upon in such perverse ways. Whether it is as "representations" of the female body that these actions take place, or as "real" sufferers of sadistic pleasures, the gendered apportioning of power and powerlessness is the determining factor. I argue that the continuing depiction of women as objects of sexual violence may contribute to the acceptance by women of themselves as victims, and by men, that this distribution of power and violence should continue. It is my contention that Carter treads this "dangerous edge" warily (see Jordan, "Dangerous Edge"), but sometimes too energetically, and despite wishing to disclose this nexus of sexuality and death in the construction of subjectivity, may at times be colluding with masculinist representation.¹ Irony, and particularly satire, works because of a double and reflexive edge and so presents an exciting but precarious challenge to the writer who acknowledges that "language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation" (Carter, "Notes" 77; emphasis added). The uses of irony are nevertheless open to misinterpretation, and both in this text and many others, it was a risky undertaking and one which "got [her] into a lot of trouble with the sisters, some of the sisters" (Katsavos 16).²

Elaine Jordan presents a well-argued case for the benefits of investigating such contentious areas of human sexuality and power in her article "The Dangerous Edge."³ Indeed, Jordan articulates rather well her own personal

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¹ In her "Notes from the Frontline" Carter states that "I was, as a girl, suffering a degree of colonisation of the mind. Especially in the journalism that I was writing then, I'd—quite unconsciously—posit a male point of view as a general one. So there was an element of the male impersonator about this young person as she was finding herself" (71).

² Anna Katsavos's interview with Angela Carter was conducted in 1988. It is likely that this text would still have caused concern for Andrea Dworkin in 1988 when a more clearly formulated legal and civil rights stance was presented with Catharine MacKinnon in *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality*.

³ Lorna Sage also comments on this "high-risk strategy." She says, "I haven't, I realise,
dilemma (with which I am immensely sympathetic) when she states: “The awkward place in which I find myself as an admirer—caught between the dictates of censors and less-than-liberal libertarians—is also a place in which feminism finds itself” (190). The difficult balancing act of continuing to give voice to the possibilities of female heterosexual and lesbian desires, and not have those overtaken by the powerful forces of a sexuality which serves the aims of capitalism and the maintenance of power in the hands of a few patriarchs, is one of the key concerns of Carter’s works. From the horrifying mutilation of Ghislaine at the hands of Honeybuzzard in her first published novel, Shadow Dance, to Tristram’s abandonment of the pregnant Tiffany in Wise Children, Carter sustained her commitment to representing the lives of women in an unjust society.

Part of the difficulty or “danger” of interpreting Carter’s writings is that her methodology is diverse, eclectic and polymorphously perverse. It contains contradictions. Yet Elisabeth Bronfen attests that Carter’s narrative strategy “attaches univocal explanatory meanings to gestures otherwise read as ambivalent” (421). While Bronfen reads Carter’s style as “adding reductive commentary to the events of the narrative” in order to encourage a preferred reading (423), I would argue that this is not reductive but rather is used as a means of locating the historical and cultural context of the work, be it fiction or essay. Carter’s weaving together of colourful threads connecting late twentieth-century tales with surrealist aesthetics and artefacts, as well as with Freudian psychoanalysis and Marcusian cultural commentary, produces a fictional world that is anything but reductive. Rather, it is overcoded and polysemic with a richness and diversity that creates ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes.

For Carter it is history that is, and must remain, the determining factor in creating changes. This is nowhere more apparent than in The Sadeian Woman. Published in 1979, The Sadeian Woman comes to us out of the heights of feminist activism and before the class warfare of the Thatcher years in Britain. Carter’s commitment to both the feminist and socialist causes contributes to her statement that “Our flesh arrives to us out of history, like everything else does” (Carter, Sadeian Woman 9). In “Notes from the Front Line” she expresses the nexus between these dual allegiances thus:

I realise, now, I must always have sensed that something was badly wrong with the versions of reality I was offered that took certain aspects of my being as a woman for granted. [. . .] This [investigation of the social fictions that regulate our lives] is also the product of an absolute and committed materialism—i.e., that this world is all that there is, and in order to question the nature of reality one must move from a strongly grounded base in what

mentioned what was at the time the most obviously scandalous aspect of her approach: her conviction that the pornographer de Sade can be made over into an ally in the task of demystification. This got her into great trouble in 1979 and for years afterwards, though radical feminist attacks on her for bad faith carry less conviction these days in the face of the range and carnival good humour of the later work” (16-17). Sage acknowledges the audacity of Carter’s project but neglects to commit herself to a position of support or disapproval.

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constitutes material reality. [ . . . ] all myths are products of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice. I'm in the demythologising business. ("Notes" 70-71)

Writing at a time when she was "getting really ratty with the whole idea of myth" (Katsavos 13), Carter critiques the appeal of mythology to women and men as an ideological strategy designed to act as consolation, and terms it instead "consolatory nonsense" (Carter, Sadeian Woman 5). Myth functions by delineating and maintaining clear roles which serve to explain differences in power. However,

these archetypes serve only to confuse the main issue, that relationships between the sexes are determined by history and by the historical fact of the economic dependence of women upon men. (Sadeian Woman 6-7)

Beginning her argument in this way, centred on historical determination and the efforts of those in power to maintain a mythological rather than historicising framework, Carter examines the aim of pornography to remove bodies from their historical context and the role of both print and film industries in this pursuit. Opposed to the masculine, active, malevolent, territorial character is the feminine passive, receptive object of desire. The pervasive ideological power of these archetypes, which form the basis for the character types of pornographic novels and films, attests to their continuing influence on the process of feminine and masculine socialisation.

The Sadeian Woman is an engagement with these cultural types and an examination of their origins and applications. Thus, we have an historical survey from Greek drama and mythologies, to the Marquis de Sade's fictions, to celluloid cultural reproductions in the parts played by Marilyn Monroe, Greta Garbo and Mae West, as well as representations of the phallic mother, the monstrous woman. The Sadeian Woman is not just an analysis of Sade's ideas in relation to his own society but rather "a late-twentieth-century interpretation of some of the problems he raises about the culturally determined nature of women and of the relations between men and women that result from it" (1). It also contends that "The sexual act in pornography exists as a metaphor for what people do to one another, often in the cruellest sense; but the present business of the pornographer is to suppress the metaphor as much as he can and leave us with a handful of empty words" (17). I wish to argue that The Sadeian Woman is a reinstatement of the metaphoric readings that are possible in the depiction of sexual acts in pornography.

As versions of the unequal distribution of power, Sade's pornography produces obscene metaphors of women's lives. "A model of hell" (24), Sade's fictional worlds provide an unromanticised view of a society, in which to be male is to be tyrannous and to be female is to be martyrisd. While these attributes are dichotomous and absolute, they are not necessarily attached to male or female bodies, but rather to the sexual positions that they perform. Thus, the utiliser of the "tool" of power, whether it be represented as appended penis, dildo or whip, enacts the male role and the receiver of these actions, the female role. For Sade, the world is divided into tyrants and victims, and "all beds are minefields" (25). For Carter, women need to be awakened to their socialisation as potential victims removed
from any access to power. This will not be achieved by learning about “romantic love” in women’s magazines, a prime ideological site for the management of femininity, but rather by using pornographic materials to function as devices for sexual terrorism, revealing metaphorically the distribution of economic and social power. Justine and Juliette begin their picaresque pornographic journeys as orphans with no income, a metaphoric depiction of the condition of women in patriarchal economies. Their choices are to become “good” or “bad” women, to ruin or be ruined. One of Sade’s microcosms of how power is allocated and deployed, is the Holy Virgin, a retreat run by Benedictine monks. Here, “in this pleasure pavilion, the pleasure of a small minority of men devolved upon the pain of the majority, their serving women” (43). As a paradigm for an hierarchical patriarchal society, this description is a useful if problematic model.¹ It presents us with a grossly unpalatable representation of an inequitable and painful society which is constructed to discriminate against women and the vast majority of men. What is described, however, are the vicarious pleasures derived from the tortured bodies of women who are chosen because they were born into wealthy families. Their bodies become sites on which to punish the fathers, in effect to sully their possessions. The great irony is that, for most of these women, it is their fathers who have socialised them to develop asexual bodies, and in acquiescing to these demands, these young women become more attractive as objects to be ruined and then to be controlled or even killed.

Both the tussle for predominance between feminist and materialist positions and the ironic narrativity of The Sadeian Woman led Andrea Dworkin to attack Carter as “pseudo-feminist” (84-85).² I wish now to examine the substance of Dworkin’s charges. Carter is accused of indulging in “a flight of fancy” (85) in her discussion of Sade’s dealings with a young woman who subsequently brought charges against him. The basis for Dworkin’s criticism is Carter’s response to Rose Keller’s attack on Sade.³ She quotes Carter’s commentary that “The affair enchants me. It has the completenes and lucidity of a script by Brecht. A woman of the third estate, a beggar, the poorest of the poor, turns the very vices of the rich into weapons to wound

¹ Of course, “pornographic” texts are not the only ones to act as devices of social and sexual terror: Toni Morrison’s Beloved and Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale also function in this way.

² Susanne Kappeler, too, disparages Carter as “the potential literary critic” and accuses her of withdrawing into the “literary sanctuary” (134). Ironically, two literary critics are challenging another “feminist’s” right to choose metaphor as a legitimate weapon in the struggle for women’s rights. To accuse Carter of hiding in the literary sanctuary is to assume that she entirely supports Sade’s own activities, or that, indeed, it is possible to make a clear distinction between life and art.

³ According to Carter, Keller had been begging on the streets on Easter Sunday (a day of particularly blasphemous significance for Sade). Sade asked if she would like to earn some money to which she agreed. However, instead of the presumed sexual favour, Sade whipped her and locked her in the room. Keller laid charges against Sade and the matter was settled out of court for a very large sum of money (28-29). For a full account of Keller’s statement, see Simone de Beauvoir, The Marquis de Sade, 211-15. This text contains the essay “Must We Burn Sade?”, which originally appeared as “Faut-il brûler Sade?” in 1951.
them with” (Dworkin 85). It seems to me that Dworkin mistakes Carter’s ironic detachment and support for a woman wielding the tools of the master’s house against him for enchantment with an apparent pro-Sadeian stance. If anything, it may be argued that this is a good example of Carter’s class sympathies overriding her allegiance to her feminist ones. To accuse Carter of “entering the realm of literary affectation heretofore reserved for the boys” (Dworkin 84) is to dismiss the uses of irony as a legitimate literary weapon in the fight for women’s rights. Dworkin fails to add that Carter’s closing sentence in the disputed paragraph reads, “An ironic triumph for the beggar woman; the victim turned victor” (Sadeian Woman 29). This is certainly a victory to be applauded in the light of Carter’s intense dislike of the role of victim for women, for “To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case—that is, to be killed” (77).

It is in the interests of the patriarchy to continue to divide women into two opposed groups of good and bad women, virgins and whores. That this division is determined by a sexual double standard in addition to class and race discriminations is productive of a containment policy which has been peculiar to women until the recent outbreak of AIDS. The Marquis de Sade represents these social attitudes to the Juliettes and Justines of late eighteenth-century French society. It was his belief that the inequalities facing women would only be removed if they abandoned their socialisation as victims and acted to take control of money, relationships and power. Carter analyses both Sade’s characters and sees many continuing parallels in the Western societies of the 1970s. Marilyn Monroe is cited as the iconic celluloid model of the woman as victim promoted by Hollywood, the modern Justine; in contrast, “the token woman in high places” (Sadeian Woman 105) is the sexual tiger, the modern Juliette. Despite Carter’s hatred of the passive victim, there is concomitant abhorrence of the ruthless career woman, modelled on Juliette, who is governed only by her heartless and supremely rational ambitions. For such a woman is still the puppet of more powerful men. “A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster,” opines Carter (27), indicating that she is very aware that a free society requires a revolution to create economic and political equality. Whereas Apollinaire equated Juliette with the New Woman, for Carter she is “a New Woman in the mode of irony” who is “a description of a type of female behaviour rather than a model of female behaviour” (79).

Whether it is Justine, the victim of male perversions, or Juliette, the diabolical mistress of men and women, or Eugénie of Philosophy in the Boudoir, who rapes and helps to infect her mother with syphilis, it is the interests of powerful men which are served. Indeed, they are “women whose identities have been defined exclusively by men” (77). As such, they are permitted to exist in one of only two possible realms: “Justine is the thesis, Juliette the antithesis; both are without hope and neither pays any heed to a future in which might lie the possibility of a synthesis of their modes of being, neither submissive nor aggressive, capable of both thought and feeling” (79). Carter’s Hegelian and utopian wish for synthesis is a vision born from the analysis of the origins and manifestations of a binary view of the world, a view which is reinforced by the ideological methods employed by those who wish to maintain phallocratic power structures.
Like Emma Goldman, Carter believed that a visionary and utopian synthesis for women would be possible only after a political and economic revolution. A measure of Carter’s commitment to this end can be found in her comment that “To be a woman is to be automatically at a disadvantage in a man’s world, just like being poor, but to be a woman is a more easily remedied condition” (78). Not all feminists would agree with this perspective, but it is a measure of Carter’s fiercely held socialist politics which underpinned her feminism. In 1979, the same year that The Sadeian Woman was published, Carter wrote a book review that appeared in New Society. Her final comments upon Gay Talese’s Thy Neighbour’s Wife: Sex in the World Today indicate that she is fervently aware that the supposed sexual revolution of the 1960s is inseparably tied to issues of access to economic and legal power:

> It goes without saying that the book is profoundly offensive to women; and poor old Talese will never be able to understand why. He really thinks women have won the right to show off their beautiful bodies and ask men to go to bed with them, and that’s liberation. (Nothing Sacred 152)

Remedying the condition of having been born a woman in a man’s world is going to take more than “fuck[ing] their way into history” (Sadeian Woman 27). It is going to take an enormous change of consciousness as well.

“To counteract victimhood as the ruling paradigm for feminism” (Jordan, “Dangerous” 194) is, I believe, still the greatest focus of The Sadeian Woman. Thus, Carter’s strongest acrimony is reserved for Marilyn Monroe and the other childlike icons of femininity produced by Hollywood. If feminism bases its politics on the prevalence of woman as victim, argues Carter, then women are prevented from thinking of behaviours other than victim:

> The victim is always morally superior to the master; that is the victim’s ambivalent triumph. That is why there have been so few notoriously wicked women in comparison to the number of notoriously wicked men; our victim status ensures that we rarely have the opportunity. Virtue is thrust upon us. If that is nothing, in itself, to be proud of, at least it is nothing of which to be ashamed. (Sadeian Women 56)

There is a decided ambivalence in this statement which vacillates between the need to extricate women from the ideological grasp of the good, martyred woman but which hangs on to the need for a site, any site, for social ethics.

For Carter, Sade’s construction of the character type of Justine is “obscene.” Her obscenity is derived from “her beauty, her submissiveness and the false expectations that these qualities will do her some good” (57). She is “the personification of the pornography of that condition” (57), a metaphor for the selfless, martyred woman who accepts her lot in life. She “becomes the prototype of two centuries of women who find the world was not, as they had been promised, made for them and who do not have, because they have not been given, the existential tools to remake the world for themselves” (57). The only hope for remedying this condition then is to improve
education for women, provide access to well-paid jobs and to remove the ideological veil from “romantic” love, the great determinant of feminine poverty and dependence.  

Constructed and crafted for the use of the Hollywood imaginists, Marilyn Monroe epitomised this type of sexual suffering dubbed by Carter, the “Good Bad Girl” (63). “A cultural product,” the Good Bad Girl was the result of the tension between the ways in which “the movies celebrated allure in itself but either denied the attractions inherent in availability or treated availability itself as a poor joke” (63). Parodying Simone de Beauvoir’s famous utterance on the acquisition of femininity, Carter states that “Monroe was not born but became a blonde” (65). Given these comments on the construction of feminine allure, it would seem that further analysis might follow in the wake of this indication of performativity. This is not to be so. What follows is a bewildering movement in and out of ironically detached analysis, and an evident disdain for the figure of the self-deriding and ignorant blonde woman who “always gets the fluffy end of the lollipop” (66). It is not the quality of blondeness that upsets Carter, who is full of praise for Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich, and is particularly enamoured of Mae West. Rather, it is the bruisability. For the Marilyns and Justines of this world, “their dazzling fair skins are of such a delicate texture that they look as if they will bruise at a touch, carrying the exciting stigmata of sexual violence for a long time, and that is why gentlemen prefer blondes” (63). A reading of this sentence and of “[Marilyn’s] death adored and longed for by all necrophiles” (64) invites tightrope-walking along a dangerous edge of interpretations. If we employ a distanced and ironical practice, then perhaps “exciting stigmata” mimics a particular masculine response. On the other hand, there is an ever so slight prurience present in this voyeuristic description. This is especially notable in the almost gleeful revelation that “You can even see real scar-tissue (from a gall-bladder operation; the female interior bearing the marks of the intimate, cruel excavation of the scalpel) in the nude pictures Bert Stern took of her the summer before her death” (64).

Carter’s description of Monroe’s body bears a striking similarity to the paintings of Frida Kahlo which depict her own medical operations and make use of the surrealist aesthetic to display the inside on the outside, and vice versa. Since Frida Kahlo was the only female surrealist that Carter liked,2 it is possible that the difficulty of clear interpretation here owes its origin to a surrealist aesthetics which is often inimical to the interests of women. However, the evident prurient fascination with both the incised body and its aestheticisation is troubling. There seems to be a gleeful destructive impulse

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1 These are all conditions for the amelioration of women’s lives suggested by Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, first published in 1792, the year after the publication of Justine or the Misfortunes of Virtue, in 1791.

2 See Carter’s reading notes which accompany a boxed edition of prints of Kahlo’s paintings and drawings (Frida Kahlo). Of especial note are The Broken Column (1944), Tree of Hope (1946) and the depiction of the results of domestic violence on a dead and nude female body in A Few Small Nips (1935).
at work which delights in the cutting down as well as the cutting up of the icon of the female victim.

At the same time that Carter is intent upon destroying this “consolatory nonsense,” this myth of the appeal of the suffering and innocent young woman, she is harshly critical of “the theory of maternal superiority” (106). This theory springs from the “fantasy land of archetypes where all the embodiments of biological supremacy live” (106). Women had to struggle hard to counteract the idea of biological inferiority based on cranial size at the end of the nineteenth century and it is our reproductive functions which mitigate, and sometimes militate, against us still. Like Sade, Carter wishes to disconnect the woman from her reproductive functions:

Because she is the channel of life, woman as mythic mother lives at one remove from life. A woman who defines herself through her fertility has no other option. So a woman who feels she has been deprived of motherhood is trebly deprived—of children; of the value of herself as mother; and of her own self, as autonomous being. (107)

For Carter, what is at stake here is the right and the need for women to define themselves as other than as mythic being bearing no relationship to their individual lives; not to be Woman but to be women. Severing the link between sexuality and reproduction is crucial to this change. For Sade, however, the advocacy of sexual autonomy for women was more complex. Mary Jacobus points to Sade’s inherent misanthropy as the basis of this belief (first things, esp. Chapter 5, “Malthus, Matricide and the Marquis de Sade”).

If women are bound by their biological ability to become mothers, and the mythology of the “supremacy of motherhood” conspires to combine with this end, then women will never determine their own lives. This crucial point drives much of the argument of The Sadeian Woman. But while Carter decontextualises her argument and locates her extrapolations in the twentieth century, Jacobus maintains the context in a particularised historical moment. Jacobus argues that both Sade and Malthus were advocating population control in the 1790s and that Sade’s deep hatred of himself and other human beings produced a desire for population control which would end the reproduction of evil. “Since Sade’s physiology of female sexuality is modelled on men’s,” argues Jacobus, “his radical solution is to render disposable what women have in excess, which is both maternity and one hole too many (for the sodomite, that is)” (85). Marked for death and disposal, women’s bodies are inscribed with pain. It is the pregnant bodies that are subjected to the worst tortures,1 and the potentially pregnant that are prevented from producing more children. Sade’s “edifice of mother-hatred” (Carter, Sadeian Woman 120) was based upon the views held at the end of the eighteenth century that it was the sperm which created new life and that the mother’s body was a mere incubator. The

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1 “Wives and mothers are sanctified by usage and convention; on them falls the greatest wrath. In the monastery of St Mary-in-the-Wood, pregnancy means a death sentence. […] In Sade’s brothels, husbands prostitute wives; husbands force their wives to witness the prostitution of daughters” (Sadeian Woman 75).
animalculists, or spermists, continued the theories of Aristotle. Ever one to locate the sources of prejudice in history, Carter notes that, “This devaluation of the actual biological status of women indicates how far prejudice can invalidate certain scientific theorising before it even begins” (120).

If Sade and his society believed that women’s bodies act as mere incubators, then it is easier, but no less excusable, to understand why they were treated as refuse. In *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, Madame de Mistival’s body is used by her daughter, Eugénie, under the instruction of Madame de Saint-Ange, her father’s mistress, and two other male libertines. All are operating on the orders of Monsieur de Mistival, who has sent his recently whipped wife to them. Yet it is Eugénie who has the double intention of forcing her mother to be part of the sexual activities which she has forbidden her fifteen-year-old daughter, and sewing up her mother’s vagina so that no more siblings will compete with her. Infecting the mother with syphilis is a mere after-thought. For this task, Eugénie uses a “cunt-cracking dildo” which “savagely restores to her mother the phallus she lacks” (Carter, *Sadeian Woman* 121). Like Madame de Clairwil in *Juliette*, who keeps a mummified penis as a dildo and claims that a penis will be found growing in her brain after her death, Eugénie wishes to have the phallus. Claims to the phallus and of the phallus circulate through these three Sadeian texts. Its disembodiment accords power to its holder, whether male or female. Saint-Ange and Eugénie are “class[ed] with the masters” (143) and so despise their own sex.

Carter’s interest in this text is twofold. First, it offers a disjunction between women and reproduction and, second, it investigates the relationship between mothers and their sexually emergent daughters. Despite the pain inflicted upon her mother, it is pleasure that Eugénie is searching for. She wants to extract a sign that her mother is capable of orgasm in order to berate her professions of propriety. But for Sade this is the unthinkable:

> Mother must never be allowed to come, and so to come alive. She cannot be corrupted into the experience of sexual pleasure and so set free. She is locked forever in the fortress of her flesh, a sleeping beauty whose lapse of being is absolute and eternal. If she were allowed to taste one single moment’s pleasure in the abuses that are heaped upon her, abuses that would glut Saint-Ange or her own daughter with joy, that would overthrow the whole scheme. (Carter, *Sadeian Woman* 128)

The whole scheme is to violate the taboo against the mother but it “has been violated only to be immediately and hideously restored” (132). Because the mother must never experience pleasure, Sade makes her faint. Carter argues that Sade loses the opportunity to become “a revolutionary pornographer” at this very point and becomes just “a simple pornographer”

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1 Carter attributes these ideas to Aeschylus (*Sadeian Woman* 120) rather than Aristotle in what may be seen as an unconscious attempt to aestheticise her argument.

2 Mary Jacobus has noted the similarity between the name, Eugénie, and eugenics in a text which also contains “a manual on late eighteenth-century methods of birth control” (85).
(132), a crime that he has been accused of for two hundred years. That we are asked to see the potential for revolution in the ability of a woman to reach orgasm while she is being tortured and raped is perhaps Carter’s greatest crime. Emma Goldman’s statement in the postscript to The Sadeian Woman that “History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts” (151) is resonant with historical truth, but falls short of confronting this description, whether it is read metaphorically or literally. I agree with Carter that developing a locus for the existence of female desire requires the body of the mother to become a desiring sexual body, but I part company with her assertion that it can be born out of violent harm to that body.

The problem with Sade that Carter identifies is that his philosophy is Manichean; that is, it is based upon a belief in the immutability of good and evil. Thus, “he can only conceive of freedom as existing in opposition, freedom as defined by tyranny” (132). Justine and Juliette exist in a dialectical relation to each other, but for Sade there is no possibility of intellectual or imaginative synthesis:

The Sadeian woman, then, subverts only her own socially conditioned role in the world of god [sic], the king and the law. She does not subvert her society, except incidentally, as a storm trooper of the individual consciousness. She remains in the area of privilege created by her class, just as Sade remains in the philosophical framework of his time. (133)

Finally, it is class that must be addressed before social conditions will be beneficial for women. Ironically, it was for the destruction of the class hierarchy that Proudhon and the utopian socialists of 1848 in France extracted from Philosophy in the Boudoir the pamphlet entitled “Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republican.”

Revolutionary socialist sentiments are also echoed in the writings of the anarchist Emma Goldman, with which Carter chooses rather abruptly to conclude her argument:

Indeed, if partial emancipation is to be a complete and true emancipation of woman, it will have to do away with the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother, is synonymous with being slave and subordinate. It will have to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds. (151)

Perhaps Carter too became aware at the end of The Sadeian Woman that she was arguing herself into an untenable position. Sade was offering an historical and aesthetic model which was appealing in its severing of the mythology of motherhood from the bodies and minds of women. However, it was a model which originated from acute misogyny and even misanthropy, and was not going, therefore, to produce positive change. After vivid descriptions of tortures inflicted upon female and especially maternal bodies, it is telling that Carter chose to conclude with an invocation to love:

In his diabolic solitude, only the possibility of love could awake the libertine to perfect, immaculate terror. It is in this holy terror of love that we find, in both men and women themselves, the source of all opposition to the emancipation of women. (150)
The biological and emotional separation of women from martyred motherhood is still the goal in the war against the single most destructive myth which pervades the discriminatory base of the patriarchy. To achieve this goal would be to usher in “the final secularization of mankind [sic]” (110), which “is why so many people find the idea of the emancipation of women frightening” (110). Perhaps, as Gertrude Meaney argues, the casualty of the figure of the mother is too great in this act of “sexual and intellectual terrorism” (97). And perhaps for Carter herself the ambivalent character of motherhood became all too apparent when she experienced the classic Freudian resolution of the mother/daughter relationship (after the death of her own mother) at the time of the birth of her son at the late age of forty-three. This possibility is suggested in the marked affection for mother figures in Nights at the Circus and Wise Children.

What I want to argue at this point is that an understanding of the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in Carter’s writings is dependent upon an understanding of her intellectual position and aesthetic heritage. The Sadeian Woman offers the clearest means to an understanding of the basis of these contradictions. Whether they are located in the doubled allegiances to women and to class, to the misogynistic aesthetic practices of Surrealism, or to the revealing of the ideological appropriation of power in maintaining mythological systems, Angela Carter is not afraid to pursue the possibilities for change by venturing into political and aesthetic minefields.

Bibliography


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