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OCEANAMERICA(S)

guest-edited by Giorgio Mariani

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(UN)IMAGINED SHORES

Cyraina Johnson-Roullier
RIAS Editor-in-Chief
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The theme of the IASA 6th World Congress, 'Oceans Apart: In Search of New Wor(l)ds' was a fitting context in which to ask the question how did the Americas become America? And, inversely, how can America be turned inside out to reveal the Americas to which it is ineradicably, albeit perhaps surreptitiously—yet certainly historically—linked, and what might that mean for our understanding of American Studies as a field? How does the ocean itself, and its boundaryless significance, figure in whatever understanding of America and/or the Americas comes to the fore. The essays included in this issue of the *Review of International American Studies* each consider this question in very different ways, from the exploration of the role of the ocean in American literature, to that of the power of the ocean's imaginary reality itself to shape our understanding of that literature. Ever present within these questions is that of the long history of empire embedded in the idea of America and all things American, what exactly that history is to mean, and how it is to be understood, especially when contextualized by the cultural significance of the ocean. With the ocean in mind, in keeping with the Congress theme, the meaning of America seems to radically shift, as the reality of the Americas becomes more evident. As this stable meaning is troubled, as traditional boundaries begin to reform in new configurations, the possibility for new discoveries about the meaning of America comes into greater prominence.

But this view from the ocean, with its new perspective on old understandings, doesn't necessarily have to mean 'out to sea'.

As Giorgio Mariani asserts, there is often a certain anxiety, even among those, like the members of the International American Studies Association, who adventurously leave their academic and intellectual points of origin to carve out new epistemological roadmaps, leading not infrequently beyond known disciplinary parameters, as these have been structured within the university. What is it about the unboundedness of uncontained knowledge, for which the sea is a striking metaphor, that can hide a subtle yet nonetheless yawning fear? There is the ever-present possibility of drowning, requiring the superhuman control necessary to calmly tread water until a familiar shore appears, rather than using every reserve of energy to flail uselessly about in panic, destroying all possibility of potentially adaptive measures. There is the desire to return to the power of what is known even in the midst of a willful voyage to the unknown, a siren's song of familiarity slamming shut the door to the new visions that the amorphous reality of limitlessness can invite.

But once the idea of treading water is accepted to the point of dictating action, once calm acceptance is allowed to set in, so too does the ocean begin to seem less of an enemy, the mind clears, solutions appear, and direction based on sharpness of thought and intrepid decision takes flight. Previously unthought avenues to understanding open up, and then, new shores. This, then, is the spirit in which the President's Address and the three plenaries to follow are offered, couple with Paweł Jędrzejko's fitting examination of Polish literature filtered through an oceanic American literary enounter. Taking America to sea, they are all a compass leading not to what is already known, but to what can be, if we but continue to calmly tread on.

Cyraina Johnson-Roullier
Editor-in-Chief, RIAS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Giorgio Mariani
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It is a great pleasure to open the 6th World Congress of the International American Studies Association (IASA). After meeting in Leiden, in Ottawa, in Lisbon, in Beijing, and then in Rio de Janeiro, we are for the first time convening in an Eastern European country. The places where we have met are themselves indicative of the planetary vocation of our organization, as are the nationalities of the many participants who have made it here today, or will be arriving over the next couple of days. The number of countries and institutions represented at this Congress is impressive—even more so in light of the enormous financial difficulties academics, both young and old, are facing these days nearly everywhere. This is of course especially the case with students and teachers in the humanities, a class of people that has come to be regarded in many corners of the globe as an endangered species. So I want to begin with a heartfelt thank you not only to those who have made this Congress possible—first and foremost the local organizing committee, chaired by the indefatigable Paweł Jędrzejko, IASA Executive Director Manju Jaidka, our vice president and treasurer Manuel Broncano, all the members of the Executive Council, and the various members of our association who helped in manifold ways—but all of you who traveled to Poland from afar—Japan, Korea, China, Brasil—as well as those who have come from neighboring, or nearly neighboring countries.

Before I say something about the Congress that we are now opening, however, please allow me to spend a few words on the two-year interval in which we have not met as an association physically,

but only through the world wide web. It has been a great honor for me to serve as President of the IASA—an appointment I consider one of the most important recognitions of my academic career. I have strived to build on the excellent work done by my predecessors—Djelal Kadir, Paul Giles, and Jane Desmond. My task has been facilitated not only by their example and expert advice, with Djelal and Jane in particular always ready to answer my queries and offer counsel and comfort, but also by the kind words, the emotional support, the intelligent and useful suggestions that have come from so many of you. I am, however, also grateful to those of you who have written to me to complain and express dissatisfaction over this or that issue. Criticism, when it is constructive and delivered in a friendly spirit, is always welcome and as much needed as gratitude. Your criticism is, I think, a sign that you care. I wish I could have done more to meet your expectations and the needs of the IASA, but the fact itself that we are here today to inaugurate our 6th World Congress is an indication of our association's strength and vitality.

As I said a moment ago, these are difficult days even for academic institutions and associations whose financial resources are infinitely greater than ours. Yet, even in such tempestuous times, thanks to the dedicated work of so many of you, the IASA ship—to switch to a nautical metaphor more appropriate to the context and theme of our Congress—has been able to keep what Melville's Ishmael famously described as 'the open independence of [the] sea' (Melville, 2001: 97). Let me stress, however, that the independence I speak of is not only an intellectual quality—the bold, independent spirit of inquiry animating all of us IASA members. When I speak of independence, I refer, first and foremost, to what all of you can read on our institutional website: 'IASA is the only world-wide, independent, non-governmental association for Americanists'. This kind of independence comes at a high price. Lacking any sort of institutional sponsor, and relying exclusively on our members' annual fees—which, as you know, can be as low as five dollars per year (and most of them are, alas, quite close to this figure)—we can only count on our members' willingness to devote part of their precious time to do whatever work is necessary to maintain our vessel in good order. So I hope you won't mind if, by breaching

perhaps the etiquette of the presidential address with an invitation better suited to the general assembly of tomorrow evening—in which I heartily recommend all of you to participate, resisting the many temptations of this wonderful city, at this particularly exciting time of the Tall Ships Race—I literally beg you to seriously ask yourselves what you can do for the IASA. Though I draw here on Jack Kennedy's words, I am *not* asking you *not* to ask yourself what the IASA can do for you—on the contrary, I am recommending that, not only over the course of the next few days, but in the weeks and months after our Congress, you *do* ask yourselves what the IASA can do for you. Please do that, keeping in mind, however, that your desires can be realized only as far as your input as an IASA member is a tangible one. It would be unfair to ask others to do things *for* you, whereas it is not only legitimate but highly recommended, that you ask others to do things *with* you. Within the IASA there aren't—to use once again terms from *Moby-Dick*—'knights' and 'squires'. Or, better, there are some of us who may look like 'knights'—the IASA officers, the members of the Executive Council, the editors of our journal—but the 'layers' (remember? a 'layer' is the percentage of the profits each member of a whaling ship was to receive, based on his role) they are entitled to are not profits, but labor—a labor that I hope is not too melodramatic to describe as, truly, a labor of love.

Let me put it this way, sticking to the maritime imagery of our present Congress. The IASA ship sails on, weathering the storms—the storms of an economic crisis that has caused so many to cancel their participation once they found out their universities had no money to support their travel; the hurricanes of a neo-liberal economy that asks most of us to take on more teaching, administrative, and organizational responsibilities without any higher monetary returns; the many small or large gales affecting our everyday lives, our families, our dear ones. But what about our intellectual adventure, our goals, our efforts to discover and explore new territories and boldly go where few, or no Americanists, have gone before? Whither the IASA? Does it make sense to ask a question like that, or should we rather feel that, by its very nature, the IASA is supposed to roam across the seven seas with no precise direction? That, to quote again from *Moby-Dick*, our ship is not so much 'bound to any haven ahead as rushing from

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all havens astern' (Melville, 2011: 327), consistently with the notion of America 'not as a terminus but rather as node through which people are passing', described by Brian Edwards and Dilip Gaonkar in the introductory essay of their collection *Globalizing American Studies* (Edwards and Gaonkar, 2010: 26)?

Whatever my obligations as President of the IASA might be, I am certainly glad that providing institutional answers to such complex questions is not part of my duties. However, I encourage all of you to keep these questions in mind over the next few days, as you will be delivering your papers, listening to the presentations of others, chatting during the coffee breaks and other informal moments. On my part, I would only like to offer a modest contribution to this debate, by sketching in an extremely cursory fashion some of the problems that arise when we bring together the 'American Studies' that is literally at the 'heart' of our association's name, with a disciplinary field that is central to the theme chosen for this 6th World Congress: oceanic studies. I must say at the outset that, though a Melvillean of sorts, I am no practitioner of oceanic studies. Yet, like all of us, I recognize the significance of what, in her splendid opening essay of a 2010 special issue of *PMLA*, Patricia Yeager identifies as the oceanic turn in literary and cultural studies. 'We have grown myopic'—Yeager writes—'about the role that seas and oceans play in creating ordinary histories and culture. Although the sea had been an exciting, deadly catalyst for trade and exploration for millennia, by the nineteenth century […] oceanic travel and ideas had become routine' (Yeager, 2010: 524). There are manifold reasons why we should not take the oceans for granted. Not only, as Yeager and others have noted, 'we are mostly made of water: not geo- but aquacentric', but we often forget that, 'Earth's commerce still depends on oceans. Ninety percent of the world's goods (most of what we eat or type on or wear) still travels in container ships' (Yeager, 2010: 523). There are further reasons for being concerned with the sea. For one, as Hester Blum notes in the same issue of *PMLA*, we may be able to break new epistemological grounds when we reconsider 'the sea as a proprioceptive point of inquiry. As oceanic studies reveal, freedom from national belonging can make possible other ways of understanding affiliation, citizenship, mobility, rights, and sovereignty, all of which have been read in recent

critical history as overdetermined by nationalism' (Blum, 2010: 671). An excellent example of the advantages of an approach of this kind is provided by Marcus Rediker's recent book on the Amistad rebellion. Treated by Steven Spielberg as a largely 'American' story, the episode is re-situated by Rediker in a larger transoceanic context, with the U.S. being only one of the several 'nodes' traversed by the rebellious slaves, whose interests are shown to be similar yet also different from those of the American abolitionists.

Given the importance of the sea in the literatures of almost any country, and its virtual identification with the experience of travel, displacement, and wonder, oceanic studies have also an intriguing philosophical and theoretical appeal. Iain Chambers, for example, believes that at sea, 'Against the metaphysical desire for certitude and control, rooted in terrestrial and territorial order, we find ourselves confronting the Nietzschean provocation of the marine horizon [...]. Not to cross but to inhabit this space is to abandon the theoretical temptation to "strike through the mask"' (Chambers, 2010: 679, 680). An oceanic turn might allow us to further deterritorialize the American imaginary by focusing more on what Cesare Casarino has identified as the floating foundations of modernity.

The sea is the source of so many seductive metaphors, and is so important to so many writers, of so many different ages that, raptured by its seeming endlessness and inappropriability, we may forget how our relationship with the oceans has always been mediated by technology and that today, no sea, however remote, is immune to the ravages brought about by global capitalism. In the essay I already referred to, Yeager speaks in fact of a 'techno-ocean' crossed daily by industrialized fishing fleets and used as a place 'for stealing resources, dumping trash, and making money through shipping, oil drilling, and so on' (Yeager, 2010: 533). Once we think about the role that American institutions and corporations play in the shaping of oceanic economic policies, for American Studies to go transoceanic would seem not only advisable, but also necessary.

I am sure that considerations like the ones I have briefly sketched, and several others concerning the possible connections between American Studies and oceanic studies will occupy many of us over the course of this Congress. In the hope of encouraging and making even more significant the conversations we are going to engage

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in here in Szczecin, I would like to recount a bit of IASA history only a few amongst you are likely to be familiar with. Two years ago, on the margins of the Rio de Janeiro Congress, our colleague Cyraina Johnson-Roullier, the editor-in-chief of *Review of International American Studies* (*RIAS*), our association's journal, presented to the Executive Council and the officers an elaborate, engaging assessment of the journal's past and present, suggesting, among other things, that a way in which our journal could find a more distinctive voice amongst other publications devoted to international American Studies, such as *NeoAmericanist* and the *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, was by changing its title. Two titles were proposed, and in both the word 'transoceanic' featured prominently. To quote directly from the document that Cyraina, along with *RIAS* associate editor Paweł Jędrzejko, had drafted:

> The rationale for the title change has to do with how we intend to differentiate the journal from its competitors. In its critical, theoretical and intellectual emphases, the journal brings something radically different to emergent transnational and hemispheric discourses on America and the Americas. With the title change, we will emphasize that, rather than focusing on either the hemispheric or the transnational, the journal places them in dialogue with one another, providing scholars seeking to move beyond conventional limitations of nation, geography, culture, race, ethnicity and/or history a forum in which to explore the trans-disciplinary, transcultural and/or transhistorical reality of intercultural connection and exchange in the cultures of America and the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia, Old World (Afro-Eurasia) and New (Americas and Australasia).

I cannot do justice here to the sophisticated arguments Cyraina and Paweł mobilized in favor of a transoceanic turn, and since no official document was ever produced of the more or less informal discussion that followed the proposal for a title change, I cannot likewise give a fair, balanced account as to why some members of the Council objected to it. I guess, however, that it would be fair to say that what some found problematic was not so much the idea of giving the journal a more global, or perhaps should I say, a more planetary scope. As the *International* Association of American Studies, why should any of us have objected to embracing what the document identified as 'a new paradigm' meant

to provide a more comprehensive frame of inquiry than those central to the hemispheric and the 'transnational' models? What some of us were perplexed by, I suppose, was the idea of having the words 'American Studies' take a backseat position. Were those of us who resisted this change simply nostalgic and/or fearful that we would have decentered 'America'/the Americas to such an extent that our object of study would have well-nigh disappeared? Were the anxieties that coagulated around this issue of the title change yet another version of that anxiety I have often detected in some of our debates—namely, that a virtually boundless 'American Studies' might in the end turn into some version of a nebulous 'World Studies' where, so to speak, anything goes? Were some of us worried that by shifting 'American Studies' to a subtitle position we would have encouraged the melting down of 'America' or the Americas into an undifferentiated oceanic liquid modernity, or that, by performing such operation we would actually be claiming *for* America the high seas? Wasn't this a confirmation of what, at some point or another, many of us have feared—that the internationalizing or globalizing of American Studies may be the lengthened shadow of America's empire gone global? After all, only a few months after some of us engaged in this informal discussion over the merits of the transoceanic paradigm, Barack Obama, in his speech at the Australian parliament of November 2011, proudly claimed:

> The United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation. Asian immigrants helped build America, and millions of American families, including my own, cherish our ties to this region. From the bombing of Darwin to the liberation of Pacific islands, from the rice paddies of Southeast Asia to a cold Korean Peninsula, generations of Americans have served here, and died here—so democracies could take root; so economic miracles could lift hundreds of millions to prosperity. Americans have bled with you for this progress, and we will not allow it—we will never allow it to be reversed. (Obama, 2011)

This passage, like much else in his speech, is exemplary in the way that Obama sees reflected in the waters of the Pacific the image of America. Aligning together World War II, Korea and, without explicitly mentioning it, Vietnam, Obama vindicates America's war-making in the region claiming it has all been for the better

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('so democracies could take root'), ignoring the over one million Vietnamese killed during one of the United States' most shameful acts of aggression against a third-world country. Nor will you find in his speech any mention of the CIA-sponsored coups in Indonesia and East Timor, which cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians and of tens of thousands of Timorese. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton reinforced the presidential line, noting in an article for *Foreign Affairs* that,

> [b]y virtue of our unique geography, the United States is both an Atlantic and a Pacific power. We are proud of our European partnerships and all that they deliver. Our challenge now is to build a web of partnerships and institutions across the Pacific that is as durable and as consistent with American interests and values as the web we have built across the Atlantic. That is the touchstone of our efforts in all these areas. (Nolan, 2013: 87)

A reading of Obama's and Hillary's texts is perhaps the best way to remind all of us why we need a vibrant, independent, and critically minded international and transoceanic American Studies, today as much as yesterday.

As you would have certainly noticed, my last remarks may adhere too closely to the land-locked preoccupations central to U.S. 'interests and values' in the region, thereby marginalizing once again the actual seas. So, as I near my conclusion, let me focus, however briefly, on an extremely important point Yeager raises in her own concluding remarks. How can the boundless oceans be protected from the greediness of blind capitalism? Should the oceans have legal standing, Yeager asks, echoing the well-known title of Christopher Stone's book, *Should Trees Have Legal Standing?* The question is an important one—one that I am sure will be debated in at least some of our Congress's papers and panels. Here I can only call your attention to some of the challenges posed by any attempt to deal with this issue. While, as Grace Slick used to sing decades ago, 'human nature don't mean shit to a tree', humans, at least in theory, can advocate the legal standing of trees, mountains, lands, and seas (Kantner and Slick, 1969). This means that our best hope for the preservation of ocean life would lie with those transnational institutional bodies, like the UN, responsible for the well-being of those areas and resources falling outside

the space of the nation. Unfortunately, the oceanic policies pursued by the UN not only should make us skeptical concerning their ability to protect what many of us would consider 'common goods' to be preserved for the sake of the whole of humankind. Such policies are also an indication that some of our theorizing about the oceans as a space beyond the nation may have been too hasty.

What I am referring to specifically is UNCLOS, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, wonderfully dissected by Peter Nolan in the March-April issue of this year's *New Left Review*. As Nolan explains,

> Prior to UNCLOS, maritime states had sovereign authority over their territorial waters, which extended to a distance of 22 kilometres (12 nautical miles) from the shore. UNCLOS effected a revolutionary change in the law of the sea by allowing countries to establish a new resource zone called the 'exclusive economic zone' (EEZ) adjacent to their territorial sea, and which extends 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the territorial sea is measured. Within the EEZ, coastal states have sovereign rights to explore and exploit the natural resources of the waters immediately above the seabed, as well as those of the seabed itself and its subsoil; they also have rights to other forms of exploitation of the zone, such as producing energy from the water, currents and winds. (Nolan, 2013: 77–8)

Keeping in mind that islands are entitled to the same maritime zones as land territory, as well as the fact that, notwithstanding the dismantling of the old colonial empires in the post-World War II period, the U.S., France, the U.K., and other former masters of the universe, have retained administrative control of remote islands and atolls—often only a few square kilometers wide, and with no population—UNCLOS must be understood as the latest act of colonial appropriation. The UNCLOS provisos are not only the late 20th century maritime equivalent of the Acts of Enclosures. As Nolan notes, 'These far-distant territories are often of immense strategic significance, with many of them containing American naval and air-force bases, as well as reconnaissance facilities' (Nolan, 2013: 79). I have no time to quote all of the amazing, shocking figures mentioned in the essay, which I would encourage all of you to read. Let me only give you a few examples.

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The EEZ of Britain, thanks to its overseas territories, is over 6 million square kilometers, eight times the total EEZ of the U.K. itself. France, however, manages to do much better, with an overseas EEZ thirty times that of metropolitan France. What about the U.S.? The United States did not sign UNCLOS, though they formally acknowledged its legality. As Nolan explains,

> A year after UNCLOS was enacted, Reagan duly proclaimed the EEZ of the United States. It is the largest of any state by a wide margin, encompassing more than 12 million square kilometers, larger by a fifth than the land area of the United States; according to one legal scholar, 'Reagan's proclamation can be characterized as the largest territorial acquisition in the history of the United States'. (Nolan, 2013: 84)

Washington is still in possession of most of the Pacific islands it acquired with the Guano Act in 1856. As a result, a land area of largely uninhabited rocks totaling a mere 87 square kilometers, due to their dispersion across the sea, is entitled to an EEZ of 1.55 million square kilometers.

In theory, the scope of UNCLOS is a noble one—to turn imperiled oceanic regions 'from open-access "global commons" into regions of conservation' (Nolan, 2013: 91). It can hardly escape anyone's attention, however, that the powers that have been placed in charge of such high-minded ecological protectionism are the same ones which, through outright conquest and violence, and especially through what Alfred Crosby long ago dubbed as biological imperialism, have devastated the peoples and pillaged the resources of these lands and seas. To entrust the great colonial powers of the West with the mission of protecting the oceans is in many ways like asking the big bad wolf to escort little red riding hood through the forest.

In sum, the notion of the inappropriability of the sea as a space-beyond-the-nation is one in need of revision. This is not to say that there is no watery expanse where 'clear national boundaries exist only in the dry, cartographic world', as Kate Flint has put it (Flint, 2009: 334). However, it would be unwise to think that the appropriations sanctioned by international laws exist only on maps. The critical imagination may well wish to replace the old, nation-based idea of the frontier, of conquest and explo-

ration, with the language of the oceanic, concerned 'with fluidity, transmission, and exchange' (Flint, 2009: 325). Nations, and the old, colonial Western nations in particular, however, are very unlikely to let go of the oceans, and what in the past may have been a watery commons is nowadays seriously threatened by a system of late-capitalist enclosures. What I have in mind here is very much analogous to what the winner of this year's Emory Elliot Prize writes in her fascinating exploration of the ocean as 'one of the leading metaphors for the Internet' (Schober, forthcoming). Like the open sea, also the world wide web holds the promise of being an open, deterritorialized space that allows for an infinite variety of points of views and ideas but, as the author of the winning essay rightly notes, the internet

> […] is still largely controlled by Western particularly, by American business organizations. As the ultimately 'global' technology, the Internet crosses national, legal, and cultural boundaries, but its dynamics and the way we navigate through it remain largely dominated by American corporations such as Google, Apple, or Facebook, thus granting the United States a privileged position in the representation and dispersion of seemingly global experience and information. (Schober, forthcoming)

There are therefore excellent reasons for American Studies to be concerned with the material as well as the metaphoric oceans.

Like American Studies itself, the oceans have been traditionally a storehouse of both Utopian and dystopian images and concepts. One of my favorite examples comes, unsurprisingly, from *Moby-Dick*. In the same chapter I quoted earlier apropos the need to keep 'the open independence of the sea', Melville makes clear that the maritime sublime is at one with its apocalyptic reversal. In Ishmael's words, 'all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore' (Melville, 2001: 97). Like 'the storm-tossed ship', 'earnest thinking' must fight against 'the very winds that fain would blow her homeward' thus 'forlornly rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe'. 'Better is it to perish in that howling infinite', Ishmael rapturously concludes, 'than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety!' (Melville, 2001: 97) With less fanfare,

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but with a similar intellectual determination, our IASA ship has been fighting against the notion that American Studies is a 'homeward bound' discipline, geographically and culturally confined to the Americas, and to the U.S. especially. Our congresses have been, literally and intellectually, efforts at crossing oceans so that, as we sailed over them, we could afford unexpected vistas of our 'ports'—the port from which each one of us has originally embarked and the more distant ones we wish to reach through our studies.

Unlike Ishmael's at once utopian and dystopian ship, the IASA vessel, I think, has not and should not 'fly all hospitality'. We are all thankful to the city of Szczecin and to our Polish colleagues for having us here. Many of us are probably less romantically inclined than Ishmael and actually appreciate those things that are 'kind to our mortalities'. And probably not all of us, no matter how fascinated we may be with the notion of deterritorialization, would be willing to accept the idea that 'in landlessness resides the highest truth', the truth of American Studies included. All of us, however, should be sympathetic at some level with Ishmael's oceanic feelings. Having embarked on the IASA ship, we are all errant scholars who have left our ports of origin behind. Whatever our differences in terms of research interests, methodologies, and human aspirations, we all share that decision to become, to a greater or lesser extent, strangers to ourselves. What this means is that, while geographically and sometimes intellectually we may indeed be 'oceans apart', we all welcome the challenge that the search for new words poses to all of us. Without necessarily melting our identities into a mystical liquidity, as Sigmund Freud feared was the case when people were swept away by oceanic feelings, we can reach for that experience of limitlessness that Freud's interlocutor, the Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland, saw as one of the positive features of the oceanic.[1] So let's be open to the thoughts and intellectual provocations of our fellow voyagers, and to the ebb-and-flow of the currents this Congress, as was the case with all previous ones, will undoubtedly generate. I wish all of you, all of us, three days of exciting, adventurous intellectual exchanges, across continents, across oceans. Thank you.

1. On the exchange between Freud and Rolland, see Rooney (2007).

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This issue of *RIAS* brings together—for the first time in the history of the IASA—revised versions of the three plenary lectures delivered at the Sixth World Congress in Szczecin. Other issues of our journal will feature selections of what are not simply 'the best of' the papers read at the congress, but also those that most readily coalesce around its overall theme, and its most significant subthemes. Here we publish three longer, more ambitious pieces, which have contributed considerably in setting the tone of the congress as a whole, and were followed by lively debates that unfortunately cannot be reproduced here, but which the authors have kept in mind in revising their work for publication. The three plenary speakers—John Matteson, Bruce Robbins, and Tadeusz Sławek—each approach the 'Oceans Apart' theme from their own specific perspectives, and their different scholarly backgrounds and research interests. All three, however, propose ways of 'defamiliarizing'—to use Paul Giles' keyword in *Virtual Americas*—America, by asking us to reframe the object of our studies in novel ways.

John Matteson revisits the transatlantic conversation between the New World and the Old, by drawing on the archive of nineteenth-century US writers about Europe. He is not so much interested in highlighting what these more or less celebrated figures had to say about Europe, its history, and its people, as in reflecting on how, through what he calls 'the intercontinental looking glass', Americans had to come to terms with the often unsettling stare of the foreigner. Though he knows his use of Du Bois' famous concept of 'double-consciousness' might appear misconceived, Matteson insists that 'the doubly conscious state that Du Bois ascribed to African Americans differed from other experiences of dual awareness not chiefly in terms of quality, but mostly of degree, though the degree is assuredly vast'. Matteson argues passionately, eloquently and, in his references to his own personal experience, quite amusingly, for the need to safeguard this tradition of cross-cultural comparison, though he ends by confessing his fears that contemporary Americans might be tempted 'to turn away from the transatlantic looking-glass entirely'.

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The historical framework that Bruce Robbins draws up for rethinking 'the newness of the New World as opposed to the oldness of the Old World' is a cosmopolitan rather than a transatlantic one, though Robbins is concerned not only with cosmopolitanism in space, but in time, too. Moving from a consideration of the political work done by the notoriously bizarre 'Blue Water Thesis', according to which only sea-based conquest would count as colonialism, Robbins asks what happens if we do not limit our critical work to studying modern colonialism, but include non-European, pre-modern colonialism into the picture. This is what he means by cosmopolitanism in time—a 'radical expansion in the time frame' that inevitably 'ends up undermining our moralized geographies'. Such unsettling of time-honored historical and moral categories is of course open to the charge of allowing America to forgive itself for its empire building, which considered on a much larger time scale, may appear just as bloody and immoral as older, non-American and non-European imperialisms. On the other hand, this might be a risk worth taking. Rethinking America in a much longer unit of time is a way to escape from the grips of American exceptionalism, and a way to remind ourselves that America may not be 'meant to be the glory and instructor of the world'.

'The risk of America', Tadeusz Sławek writes in the final plenary lecture, 'is [...] America itself—its endless, limitless ambitions [...] to know absolutely everything'. These words resonate in important ways with the diagnosis of the contemporary world offered in *The Transparency Society* by Byung-Chul Han—a German-Korean theorist whose work has only recently begun to appear in English translation. Byung-Chul Han attacks transparency as a contemporary false ideal. The illusion that we can obtain information about everyone and everything—that thanks to technological innovations like the Internet, the world has become transparent—runs counter to the actual impoverishment of our ability to make sense of this wealth of data. We accumulate information, but this does not necessarily mean that our knowledge of the world increases. Through a deft and illuminating reading of poetry by Robinson Jeffers and e. e. cummings, matched by astute references to Norman O. Brown, Jean Luc Nancy, and George Bataille, and others, Sławek traces the poets' brave struggle against the culture and rhetoric

of ‘excess’. Jeffers and cummings, but also D. H. Lawrence, were quick to denounce that America was turning into a ‘world in which everything is “far too”, i.e., a world subjected to human ambition and desire, a world of hasty activism’ where only Theodore Roosevelt’s ‘one hundred percent Americans’ would be welcome. To the nightmarish dream of a panoptical, completely transparent America, Sławek opposes a poetic and cultural tradition that stands firmly opposed to ‘the hubristic desires of the American state to know absolutely everything regardless of civil rights and political and economic costs’.

Taken together, the three essays offer plenty of provocative perspectives on rethinking America. They are, in other words, a fitting contribution to the unending international conversation that is the IASA’s most important *raison d’être*.

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INNOCENCE TO EXPERIENCE (AND BACK AGAIN?):

Uncertain Passages through the Intercontinental Looking-Glass

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Our work begins with a kind of seeing. Wherever on the globe we may call home, practitioners of American Studies seek first and fundamentally to observe. As we bear witness to the life, history, and culture of the United States in all its complexities and contradictions, we seek much more than a surface knowledge. We aspire to penetrate through a resistant surface to another side of reality. Yet when we set forth in hopes of looking at and into the world around us, we are also likely to find our own image mirrored back toward us. Our best efforts at understanding do, I think, tend to double back upon us. The knowledge we seek regarding the Other comes back to us freighted with a new and different understanding of ourselves. From this both penetrating and reflected seeing—and also from the phantasmagoric legacy of Lewis Carroll—comes the metaphor for this essay's title: the intercontinental looking-glass.

As even a skim of the contents of this volume will confirm, however, one might as aptly choose another framing trope of vision: not a mirror, but a kaleidoscope. The chapters herein are transatlantic, transpacific, transnational, and transcendental. They simultaneously translate, transfix, and transform. They represent the best work of a conference that summoned the restless ghosts of Melville, Twain, Nella Larsen, Auden, Conrad and Allende. Containing multitudes in Whitmanesque fashion, the proceedings subsumed Rene Descartes, Arthur Miller, Eleanor Roosevelt, and even Whitman himself. As those who were there

can well attest, the Sixth Congress of the International American Studies Association offered up some rare seeing indeed.

Amid all this seeing, my own first glance was, and is, retrospective. I think back to my first, somewhat inglorious visit to the European continent, which took place in October 1970, when I was all of nine-and-a-half years old. The trip was orchestrated by my late father, a man blessed with a deep sense of adventure—and cursed with a love of Peugeot automobiles and extremely fragrant French cheese. I say that he was cursed, not because of any deficiencies either in the cars or in his beloved fromage, but rather because of the unforgettable woes that the combination of the two inflicted upon his family during that month. His plan was to fly, with my mother, my 16-year-old sister and me, to Paris to purchase a spanking new Peugeot 504, load it with as much cultured French dairy product as he could get his hands on, and embark on an ambitious automotive tour of northwestern Europe, which included a tour of the Loire Valley, a Hannibalesque charge through the Swiss Alps, a rendezvous with family friends in Vienna, and, at last, a steak dinner at Port Van Cleve in Amsterdam. Thereafter, the car would be shipped stateside as the family Matteson flew triumphantly home. Sadly, for reasons known but to God, whose sense of humor is indeed peculiar, my father chose to load his prized comestibles into the back seat, not into the trunk of the car. Perhaps he feared that the cheese would be ruined in the trunk; he apparently had no comparable qualms about what miseries he might be visiting upon his next of kin. My sister, who was never anybody's fool, found out about this arrangement before my mother and I got wind of it, and prudently claimed the front seat for the duration of the trip. That left my mother and me directly in the line of fire, which turned out to be withering.

The Peugeot was the first new car I remember riding in. However, the delicious new-car smell that enraptures so many was never to be ours. From the first hours, the dominant aroma was of warm, steadily ripening Camembert and Brie. It occurs to me that most of you have never had the experience of riding in the back seat of a Peugeot along winding roads toward the summits of the Swiss Alps in the company of gargantuan

bags of warm, soft French cheese. Permit me to assure you that the experience is never to be forgotten and is zealously to be avoided. Memories from childhood tend to be patchy. However, as the car wound through the Alps, I vividly recall thinking of the scene from *The Sound of Music* in which the Mother Superior counsels Julie Andrews to 'climb every mountain'. I understood why poor Julie looked a trifle sick as she took in the advice. And she didn't have any cheese to contend with.

By the time we arrived in Vienna, both my mother and I were functionally disabled—hapless victims of a host of Gallic creameries. My father and sister waltzed off to sample the radiant nightlife of the Austrian capital, while my mother and I attempted to go through Camembert detox. We lay motionless in the dark, praying quietly for death. Whether we thereafter built up an immunity or whether my father finally relented and demoted the cheese to the trunk, I do not recall. But I don't think the air inside the car lost its dusky overtones for months afterwards, and it was decades before I reconciled with soft cheese.

Such was one of the two dominant memories I have of that journey. The other, I think, bears more directly on the subject of American Studies. It has to do with the deep, abiding concern of both my parents that, in the course of our travels, we might ever be perceived by the local population as being typically American. It was evidently their ambition to come as close as possible to being accepted as native-born citizens of whatever country they were passing through—citizens who, evidently, had never managed to absorb their country's own language but who had an extraordinary command of English. They wanted desperately to pass, and I recall their omnipresent horror as they looked at me, the boorish little stranger to culture who threatened every moment to give the game away. They suffered agonies as they realized that the beauties of the Louvre and Chenonceau mattered less to me than how the Baltimore Orioles were doing back home in the World Series. In Paris, my father patiently coached me on how to ask the concierge for the key to our room, as well as a few other phrases. I must have been doing poorly at these impromptu lessons because, as we drew nearer to the German-speaking world, Father became less ambitious.

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He taught me to say 'I don't speak German', and left it at that. The funny thing is that he had me say 'Ich spreche nicht Deutsch' instead of 'Ich spreche kein Deutsch'. So even what he taught me was a dead giveaway.

I would point out that my parents' anxiety was in no way prompted by concerns about being identified with the political positions of the United States. They were fiercely patriotic people who subscribed with their whole hearts to the idea that America had been given a divine mission on earth. Had you asked them whether the USA was the greatest nation in the world, they would have immediately said yes, and then looked puzzled to think that you even had to ask. Like most nine-year-olds, I hadn't started thinking very critically about my parents' world-view. And yet I dimly recall thinking that something didn't quite add up. If we really did come from the greatest of all worldly nations, then why act differently abroad from how we would act on vacation in an American city? I could see, of course, that questions of courtesy were at issue, and courtesy and respect for one's hosts mattered unusually in my family (indeed, I have wondered ruefully whether, even in this, we were already somehow not quite 'American'). Yet, as I look back on it, it appears to me that my parents had absorbed two contradictory feelings about national identity that they had chosen not to reconcile. It seems to me that they were entirely confident in America's superiority until they fell directly under the scrutiny of Europe, at which moment their self-assurance promptly teetered. On American soil, American self-regard reigned supreme. Abroad, it promptly felt flimsy and suspect.

Now, I haven't taken a survey of my countrymen, so I don't know how prevalent feelings like those of my parents are among Americans who venture abroad. But I suspect they are fairly common. For me, they call to mind the musings of W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* on the subject of double-consciousness, which I have always greatly respected. However, I think Du Bois may have erred in presuming them to be applicable solely to African Americans. Du Bois famously wrote:

> After the Egyptian and the Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil,

> and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1986: 364–65)

Du Bois described a day-in, day-out suffering of inwardly felt duality. It was a feeling exacerbated by regular experiences of cruel, highly systematized and potentially violent racial prejudice. It was a state of being from which one never got to take a holiday. In daring to compare Du Boisian double-consciousness in all of its profound complexity with the transient existential malaise that a white middle-class American may experience while on vacation, one may court the accusation of not having taken Du Bois's reflections seriously enough. I wish to maintain that I take Du Bois very seriously indeed. Yet it has always seemed to me that the doubly conscious state that Du Bois ascribed to African Americans differed from other experiences of dual awareness not chiefly in terms of quality, but mostly as a matter of degree, though the degree is assuredly vast. I would argue that a species of double-consciousness is likely to exist whenever a person finds himself or herself in a proximate relation to another person, or to a social surrounding, in which a hierarchy is presumed to exist. Double-consciousness can emerge at the moment that one feels the scrutiny of an imagined superior.

The tricky thing about this consciousness is that it may arise unbidden even when neither party to the relation places an ounce of faith in the reality of the supposed distinction. I am more than willing to believe that not a person reading these words believes, at least publicly, in the innate superiority of one group of persons to another. And yet I would also suppose that quite a few of us have felt the unique feelings of dread and inadequacy that can be inspired by a Parisian waiter. The gaze of an Other to whom one either rationally or irrationally ascribes superiority may trigger self-criticism and, as in my parents, a powerful desire to make oneself pleasing to the observer. To the contrary,

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however, it may also prompt one to strut all the more arrogantly upon the stage, to carry one's perceived disadvantages more than a little defiantly, perhaps even as a point of pride. When an African American experiences double-consciousness in relation to white America, he experiences it from a standpoint of racial difference. By contrast, when a white American feels inner duality in relation to white Europeans, he feels it in terms of uncanny similarity, like observing oneself in a slightly distorted looking glass. We look, by and large, the same. On most levels, there would seem to be more to unite than divide us. Whence, then, the difference? From what derives the anxiety, the distance that can be so hard effectively to span? The questions are admittedly large, and I approach them uncomfortably aware of the narrowness of my own experience. I can tell you only how these things appear to an American English professor who has grown accustomed to seeing most of life through another distorting window: the lens of the nineteenth century. But what I propose to do is to look at a few American literary experiences of Europe from generations past and offer some suggestions about what they can teach us about nationalized selves and others and the transatlantic looking-glass.

On Saint Patrick's Day 1833, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had begun a long European tour the previous December, ate dinner at a trattoria in Naples. Emerson was more aware than most of his countrymen of the irksome intrusiveness that American tourists inflicted upon their European hosts. In his journal he had written, 'We steer our ships into your very ports & thrust our inquisitive American eyes into your towns & towers & keeping-rooms. Here we come and mean to be welcome' (Emerson, 1964: 109). But on this evening the tables were turned in a most unwelcome fashion. The serenity of Emerson's meal was disturbed by the sight of a beggar, who stood outside the restaurant's window, 'watching', as Emerson wrote, 'every mouthful' (Emerson, 1964: 145). For any tourist, who travels by definition to look and to see, it can be a disconcerting reversal to be looked *at*, and it seems that more than once Emerson was unsettled by a foreign stare. The journal that he compiled in Italy evinces uneasy self-consciousness and an uncomfortable awareness of being judged. He had come

to Europe 'to learn what man can, [to know] what is the uttermost that social man has yet done' (Emerson, 1964: 74). And yet he felt his quest to know the people who most interested him was making him an annoyance. He wrote, 'The people at their work, the people whose avocation I interrupt by my letters of introduction, accuse me by their looks for leaving my business to hinder theirs' (Emerson, 1964: 79). In Venice, he felt maladroit and childish: 'I have no skill to live with men [...] It seems to me, no boy makes as many blunders or says such awkward, contrary, disagreeable speeches as I do' (Emerson, 1964: 74). He found himself tempted 'to flee out of society and live in the woods' (Emerson, 1964: 74). Exposure to the more mature culture of Europe had made Waldo feel boyish; in the heart of civilization, he yearned suddenly for the primeval. Amid the wonders he had dreamed of, he wrote, 'I am perplexed by my inveterate littleness' (Emerson, 1964: 75). Boyishness, littleness, a wish to flee society: these all feel like the reaction of one who knows his own culture is junior and fears it to be primitive. Embarrassed as he was of his own inadequacy in this new old place, Emerson was even more abashed by the demeanor of his fellow tourists, who, he concluded, were absorbing all the decadence and none of the nobility of the foreign scene. 'Alas', he lamented, 'the young men that come here & walk in Rome without one Roman thought! They unlearn their English & their morals, & violate the sad solitude of the mother of nations' (Emerson, 1964: 157). And yet, when he tried to assert an American superiority over what he witnessed, Emerson found himself falling back on a pride in American savagery. On seeing a papal ceremony at the Sistine Chapel, he observed, 'All this pomp [...] is imposing to those who know the customs of courts [...] But to the eye of an Indian I am afraid it would be ridiculous' (Emerson, 1964: 153).

Emerson's journal gives us a sense of two cultures gazing at each other from across a divide, in ways we can recognize as familiar, if somewhat stereotypic. The American feels himself being judged for his lack of breeding and somehow accused for what appear to be his easy circumstances. He in turn looks out upon an old world that he finds overly ceremonious, formerly noble but now corrosive to English-speaking morality. It seemed hardly

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a basis for open and enlightened understanding. Yet thankfully, Emerson was able to extract a benefit from the cultural impasse by using it as a tool for improved self-knowledge. His excursion had barely begun when he wrote the following reflections:

> Wherever we go, whatever we do, self is the sole subject we study & learn [...] The chemist experiments upon his new salt by trying its affinity to all the various substances he can command arbitrarily selected & thereby discloses the most wonderful properties in his subject & I bring myself to sea, to Malta, to Italy, to find new affinities between me & my fellow-men, to observe narrowly the affections, weaknesses, surprises, hopes, doubts, which new sides of the panorama shall call forth in me. (Emerson, 1964: 67–68)

Emerson stressed that he wrote not from a low, sneaking sense of self, but was speaking rather of 'the Universal Man to whose colossal dimensions each particular bubble can by its birthright expand' (Emerson, 1964: 68). Human beings, then, know themselves by their reactions and interactions, and Emerson proposed to treat his travels as a voyage of inner discovery, borne forward by the faith that the European other would lead him to a new and grander definition, not only as a personal self but as a national self. He would test his truths and those of his country by holding them against the assumptions of other people and places, no matter how violent the 'contrasts of condition & character' (Emerson, 1964: 78). To extend Emerson's metaphor, if all went right, the chemical reactions between American and European would be exothermic, yielding greater energy and warmth and leading toward a higher synthesis of spirits, in combinations never yet foreseen.

Emerson was not the only American traveler of note in the nineteenth century to observe the effects of the cross-cultural gaze, the appraising glance or stare that carried with it a consciousness of difference and a re-envisioning of self. Emerson's fellow New Englander Nathaniel Parker Willis distinguished himself as a poet, an editor, and the most highly paid magazine writer of his time. Nevertheless, a strange sensation overtook him on the streets of Paris. He observed:

> It is a queer feeling to find oneself a *foreigner*. On cannot realize, long at a time, how his face or his manners should have become peculiar;

and, after looking at a print for five minutes in a shop window, or dipping into an English book, or in any manner throwing off the mental habit of the instant, the curious gaze of the passer-by, or the accent of a strange language, strikes one very singularly. (Willis, 1852: 8)

Paris, Willis observed, was full of foreigners of all descriptions. Still, he stood convinced that the separateness that was felt by an American was unique in its magnitude. However much Europeans might differ from one another, Willis averred:

[...] they differ still more from the American. Our countrymen, as a class, are distinguishable wherever they are met. [...] [T]here is something in an American face, of which I was never aware till I met them in Europe, that is altogether peculiar. (Willis, 1852: 8)

Having sensed the difference, Willis tried to interpret it as favorable and complimentary: 'As far as I can analyze it, it is the independent, self-possessed bearing of a man unused to look up to any one as his superior in rank, united to the inquisitive, sensitive, communicative expression which is the index to our national character' (Willis, 1852:8). Willis concluded his musings on the subject by asserting, 'Nothing puzzles a European more than to know how to rate the pretensions of an American' (Willis, 1852: 8).

Willis was making a kind of double discovery—his was the experience not only of a new country but of an adapting self, revising itself in response to the gaze of the native. His consciousness of the singularity of the American face and the inscrutability of American pretensions would never have arisen had it not been for this gaze, which first unsettled and then somehow confirmed his feelings of identity. Although he wrote of the pretensions of an American, what he had in fact found felt to him like a core of authenticity. Without particularly trying, the Americans had achieved a kind of uniqueness. Even if that uniqueness inhered principally in a frank artlessness and a seeming lack of discrimination, it offered a basis for a national character, and one that Willis was happy to own.

Margaret Fuller was less interested in defining a national character than she was in preserving and perfecting her own. If she had to belong to any group at all, she once wrote, she preferred that it be a constellation rather than a human phalanx.

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The national character of Americans that Fuller observed abroad was not greatly flattering. As the Roman Revolution of 1849 neared its high-water mark, Fuller encountered a countryman who professed no confidence in the newly founded Roman Republic because he had 'no confidence in the People'. Why? Fuller asked. 'Because they are not like *our* People'. Fuller fumed at the man's chauvinism: 'Ah! Jonathan—excuse me, but I must say the Italian has a decided advantage over you in the power of quickly feeling generous sympathy, as well as some other things which I have not now time to particularize' (Ossoli, 1895: 358). If Fuller's siding with the European party seems almost reflexive, it was hardly anything new for her. From the time Fuller was a child, she imagined herself as a displaced European. She played frequently at being an Old-World monarch and voiced her opinion that she had been born in the wrong country. If, of the people I am to mention today, she was the one on whom actual travel to Europe had the least purely intellectual influence, that was so because she had so thoroughly Europeanized herself before she arrived. By her mid-twenties, Fuller had absorbed the canonical literature of Germany, Spain, France, and Italy. She had seen the great works of art, at least in printed form. She had so deeply immersed her mind in the images and verbal cultures of the western half of the continent that, when she at last arrived there in 1846 at the age of thirty-five, much of what she saw felt already like a twice-told tale. When she was twenty-five, an opportunity to travel had danced briefly before her eyes but then vanished when her father suddenly died, and she was forced to stay at home to help her family. For another eleven years, her Europeanness remained secondhand and telescopic. At twenty-five, she felt, such a trip would have given her genius wings. At thirty-six, she lamented, 'My mind and character are too much formed. I shall not modify them much but only add to my stores of knowledge' (Fuller, 1846: 193).

Her mind was already formed. Her heart, however, was still in metamorphosis. While staying in Paris, she met George Sand. The interview between the French libertine and the virgin Massachusetts bluestocking was electric. Despite her many love affairs, Sand struck Fuller as 'never coarse, never gross',

and seemed to possess, incredibly a kind of 'purity in her soul' (Fuller, 1875: 197). Fuller used the noun 'goodness' to describe Sand's expression, and she italicized the word. She then went further, calling Sand 'Cybele, the great goddess, the great mother'—a pagan deity of midnight rituals and howling, moonlit orgies—and a lover 'of night and storm, and free raptures' (Fuller, 1875:197). The whisperings of the sensual grew louder when she became friends with Poland's national poet, Adam Mickiewicz, who exhorted her to 'respond to the legitimate needs of [her] organism' and to 'give all for love, but this love must not be that of the shepherds of Florian nor that of schoolboys' (Mickiewicz, 1847: 352). Under such influences, Fuller opened her spirit to the pleasures of Rome, bedded an impoverished marchese, and conceived a child without taking the trouble to marry. When she discovered she was pregnant, Fuller was at first repelled by her own rashness; she eventually accepted that her European awakening had merely teased out a dormant aspect of her existing personality. The looking-glass had shown her something that she at first found alien, but then accepted as her own image. She wrote: 'I could not analyze at all what passed in my mind. I neither rejoice nor grieve. For bad or for good I acted out my character' (Fuller, 1875: 277). Fuller's experiences may be seen, perhaps, as an extreme example of a more typical American reaction: having seldom acknowledged the power of sexuality or, indeed, of womanhood in their own culture, Americans of the nineteenth century were quite readily taken aback at the European regard for the feminine, whether that femininity was that of Cybele or the Blessed Virgin. It was this reaction that, more than a half-century later, received the incisive scrutiny of Henry Adams.

When Adams first set foot on foreign soil, he was a young man of twenty. And yet, as he wanders the gardens of Eaton Hall, he becomes, in his own description, a boy, awestruck at the remarkable discovery that, as he later wrote, 'Aristocracy was real' (Adams, 1983: 786). As Adams confronts the sheer size and 'absolutely self-confident' airs of London, self-consciousness subdues him. He recalls, 'the boys in the streets made such free comments on the American clothes and figures, that the trav-

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ellers hurried to put on tall hats and long overcoats to escape criticism' (Adams, 1983: 787). As he and his traveling companions purchase new wardrobes to armor themselves against critique, Adams is aware, as he is so often aware, that his education is falling backward. As his travels lengthen to include Berlin, Dresden, and Rome, Adams finds his American perceptions repeatedly challenged. 'Rome', he writes, 'could not be fitted into an orderly, middle-class, Bostonian, systematic scheme of evolution' (Adams, 1983: 803). And yet he feels an almost inarticulate sense that he is gazing upon America's destiny, and that it is gazing back at him. Cryptically he notes, 'Rome was actual; it was England; it was going to be America'. (Adams, 1983: 803) It is all too much to decode, and Adams dreads the prospect of returning to America, after much time and money lost, and being able to tell his father nothing more than, 'Sir, I am a tourist!' (Adams, 1983: 800).

Yet one senses that Adams was a very special case, one of the most multifariously conscious beings his nation has produced. Too European in his attachment to hereditary entitlement to be fully American, too fascinated with brash mechanical force to renounce America's seductions, Adams achieved an ironic distance in his commentary on his native country that seems to have afforded him a perfect focus, and it was a peerlessly intimate familiarity with European traditions that made his lens so polished. One is not likely to forget the sensation of reading for the first time the *tour de force* that is Adams's chapter on the Dynamo and the Virgin and his frank admission that, 'as he grew accustomed to the great gallery of machines [that surrounded him at an international Exposition], he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross' (Adams, 1983: 1067). It is a moment of sheer audacity: a man, arguably the most cultured and civilized that his country has to offer, confessing his vulgar worship of the crank and the gear, knowing full well the crassness of the sentiment, but announcing it because it is true. Adams sees in the culture of mechanism an abysmal fracture in the very structure of history, yet one suspects that the structure itself would have been invisible to him had he not learned to look upon

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the surge of events with an eye essentially European. Adams confesses that his New England boyhood had taught him to regard the cultural forces of antiquity as nothing more than curiosities; the most accomplished chemist in Boston had probably never heard of Venus except as a figure of scandal, or of the Virgin as anything but a symbol of idolatry. Yet only through the refractive lenses of Mary and Aphrodite can Adams observe the cult of the dynamo was something both to be admired and to be feared. Europe, in very large part, taught Adams to observe—and, indeed, made him fear that he was only an observer, squinting at life through both sides of the transatlantic looking-glass and rendered all but helpless by what he saw.

Mark Twain took up the subject of the transatlantic gaze with a good deal less melancholy and self-accusation—and a heavy helping of mock superiority. His recollections in *The Innocents Abroad* demand little, if anything, in the way of comment:

> Many and many a simple community in the Eastern hemisphere will remember for years the incursion of the strange horde in the year of our Lord 1867, that called themselves Americans, and seemed to imagine in some unaccountable way that they had a right to be proud of it. [...] They looked curiously at the costumes we had brought from the wilds of America. They observed that we talked loudly at table sometimes. They noticed that we looked out for expenses, and got what we conveniently could out of a franc, and wondered where we came from. In Paris they just simply opened their eyes and stared when we spoke to them in French! We never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language [...].
>
> The people stared at us everywhere, and we stared at them. We generally made then feel rather small, too, before we got done with them, because we bore down on them with America's greatness until we crushed them. (Twain, 1984: 516)

As if to refute much of what I have said on the subject, Twain's tourists are defiantly *singly* conscious. The 'we' in Twain's passage evinces a rhinoceros-like boorishness that is very nearly the opposite of Du Bois's divided self and of Adams's hypersensitive self-examination. Twain's Americans blunder forward with a confidence born of naïveté and insolence. True, they are faintly conscious of the astonished gazes of their hosts, but they think nothing of them. The perspectives of the cultural other—even his opinions of how his own language should

be pronounced—evaporate in the face of the sheer blind force of the tourist. Gone is the Emersonian sense of smallness. Triumphant is the notion that, standing next to even the most formidable object, the American must seem and consider himself large. Yet the insouciance of Twain's 'innocents' was only a caricature of an especially unfeeling breed of American visitor, representing neither the best nor the brightest of the upstart nation. More reflective emissaries from the States continued the process of measuring one's American self against European models, and thereby acquiring a revised understanding of one's own individual and national character. That process was to become central to the work of Louisa May Alcott.

Like many Americans who traveled to Europe in the nineteenth century, Louisa May Alcott was, more than anything else, just glad to be there. She first came to England and the Continent in 1865, three years before the publication of *Little Women* made her rich and made traveling affordable. She thus made her first excursion as the paid companion of a peevish New England semi-invalid. But, for all of that, she remained cheerful, delighting in 'farmhouses [...] with low, thatched roofs [...] and buxom women or rosy children at the doors'. (Alcott, 1987: 111). Still, she felt her strangeness and the strangeness of what surrounded her. In her newly discovered Europe, she observed, 'Every thing was so unyankee'. (Alcott, 1987: 111). Even the livestock had somehow absorbed a different national character:

> Nothing was abrupt, nobody in a hurry, and nowhere did you see the desperately go ahead style of life that we have. The very cows in America look fast, and the hens seem to cackle fiercely over their rights like strong minded old ladies, but here the plump cattle stood up to their knees in clover, with a reposeful air that is very soothing, and the fowls cluck contentedly. (Alcott, 1987: 111)

There was an unreality to this world. In London, Alcott 'felt as if I'd got into a novel' (Alcott, 1989: 141). One cannot quite tell whether it was the surroundings or Alcott herself that felt like the greater fiction.

As Alcott's travels progressed, her sense of illusoriness faded, and she looked at the people of other nationalities whom she encountered as points of reference by which to reaffirm her own

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Americanness. A Russian baron in her hotel in Switzerland seemed turbulent and barbaric. An overfed Frenchman seemed always to be striking Napoleonic poses. An English colonel, bent on pumping his half-dozen children full of information on 'the Spanish Inquisition, the population of Switzerland, the politics of Russia, and other lively topics, equally suited to infant minds', squared perfectly with her preconceptions of a British pedagogue, as formed by her reading of *Dombey and Son* (Matteson, 2007: 315). There is, in her observations of the foreign, an implicitly American standard of judgment: Americans, if rough around the edges, were not Cossacks. Americans, if they sometimes indulged in aristocratic fancies, were not the strutting *poseurs* one encountered among the French. Her observations of European types were subtly confirming: Americans, one deduces from her writings, were a kind of ideal average, avoiding the excesses of their European forbears.

In *Little Women*, Alcott was to use glimpses of foreignness as a system of contrasts against which to define American identity. When she drafted *Little Women,* Alcott wrote the first twelve chapters for the book's eventual publisher, Roberts Brothers, with no promise of a contract. She wrote without relish, hoping, as she later confessed to prove to her editor Thomas Niles, that she had no talent for writing a girls' book so that he would leave her alone. The last of the twelve chapters she wrote on spec is of special interest, though, because, coming at the end of the block of text that, for all Alcott knew, would be all of the project she would ever write, it represents a kind of mini-ending within the completed novel. Just as Part One of *Little Women* functionally ends with the March sisters having passed the moral test that was set for them by their father's being away at the war, Chapter Twelve, the last of the preliminary chapters, is a kind of midterm exam, in which we observe the girls' moral progress to date. It is significant that Alcott couches this examination in an encounter with Europeans; the March sisters have accepted an invitation to go on a picnic with their neighbor Laurie and some well-heeled visitors from England.

Though Alcott never identifies the scene of *Little Women* as her adopted hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, we may presume that the croquet battle takes place a stone's throw

from the field where the Redcoats and the colonists fought one of the first engagements of the American Revolution. The action is set in July 1862, the very moment when Britain's diplomatic machinations in support of the Confederate States of America were teaching Henry Adams some unforgettable lessons in political amorality. Not surprisingly, then the conflicts in the chapter, which is the longest in the novel, are developed along the lines of transatlantic rivalry, shaped by the need of each contingent to demonstrate the superiority of its own country. Especially put to the test in this chapter are the oldest March sister, Meg, who has been vulnerable in the past to criticisms of her family's poverty and her own social accomplishments, and Jo, who struggles to master her unruly temper. The first cross-cultural observation is benign; Meg, who has tried to make herself worthy by putting an extra row of curls in her hair, is grateful to see that her British counterpart Kate Vaughn 'was dressed with a simplicity which American girls would do well to imitate' (Alcott, 2005: 134). Almost immediately, Englishness begins to show to disadvantage: Kate exudes a 'stand-off-don't-touch-me air, which contrasted strongly with the free and easy demeanor of the other girls' (Alcott, 2005: 134). Nevertheless, Alcott uses Kate's appraising gaze as a means of validating American manners; by the end of the next paragraph, 'after putting up her glass to examine' the rambunctious Jo several times, Kate determines 'that she was 'odd, but rather clever', and smiles on her from afar' (Alcott, 2005:135).

However, Jo's approval in the eye of the elder culture is soon threatened when she catches Kate's younger brother Fred cheating at croquet and immediately escalates the infraction into a miniature international crisis:

'We don't cheat in America: but *you* can, if you choose', said Jo, angrily.
'Yankees are a deal the most tricky, everybody knows. There you go', returned Fred, croqueting her ball far away. (Alcott, 2005: 136)

Jo checks her ready temper and, stroke by stroke, moves back into striking range. As she executes a winning shot, she declares, 'Yankees have a trick of being generous to their enemies [...]

especially when they beat them' (Alcott, 2005: 136). We are meant to feel that a victory has been won for American virtue.

Meanwhile, Meg faces her own test of virtue, as her vanity is wounded when Kate responds with shock to the revelation that Meg must work to support her family. Meg's future husband, the gallant Mr. Brooke, rescues the situation, first by observing the independence and industry of American women and then in a more surprising fashion; he produces a copy of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* in the original German and proposes that both Meg and the young Englishwoman read aloud. Kate's reading is technically perfect but devoid of emotion. Meg mispronounces a number of words but turns the passage into poetry with her gentle voice and natural feeling for tragedy. For an instant, Meg becomes an improbable noble savage, comparatively unlettered but possessing an innate sensibility that is deemed more valuable than the ability to reproduce a perfect but soulless form. Kate delivers a final verdict at the end of the party: 'In spite of their demonstrative manners, American girls are very nice when one knows them' (Alcott, 2005: 148). In Chapter 12 of *Little Women*, virtue becomes a patriotic enterprise.

A significant tension arises in the chapter from the conflict in the March girls' motivations: they must both compete with the representatives of European culture and win their approval. They need to achieve standing, but that status is to be judged by the very people they hope to surpass. One may question whether Alcott actually intended to make the point, but she struck here upon a fundamental paradox of the American character: we find it important to win (and, parenthetically, it also matters that we be perceived to have won virtuously), but we also want desperately for other people to like us. In the happy world of *Little Women*, these desires do not end up conflicting: almost miraculously, the March sisters emerge from their contest with Britain both triumphant and beloved. In less ideal realms, the dual quest of America for preeminence and love has led to darker complications.

Both in other passages in *Little Women* and beyond, Alcott continually defines American-ness through a system of contrasts with European values, though the intended lessons are not always

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perfectly consistent. Frenchness is frequently code for a dangerous frivolity and laxness of morals; Amy March's repeated youthful butchering of phrases like 'comme il faut' is meant to be awkwardly endearing, yet they also stand as a telltale sign of potential corruption. When a child in *An Old-Fashioned Girl* boasts of a wardrobe fit for a Paris doll and a French maid to dress her, we instantly fear for her future. And yet, Amy's first glimpse of a spiritual dimension to existence comes courtesy of a Frenchwoman, Aunt March's maid, Estelle, who explains to the Protestant Amy the significance of the rosary and encourages her to pray and meditate as a way to inner peace. Moreover, when Amy seeks the polish that will prepare her for a position in the upper echelons of society, it is, of course, to France that she travels.

Alcott's responses to cultural difference are seldom deeply revelatory. She was, as she ruefully confessed, turning out 'moral pap for the young' (Matteson, 2007: 420). Extremely subtle moral colorings were not in her line, and her observations of ethnic difference and cultural hierarchy may now strike us as pat and stereotypic. However, her essential perceptions were apt: Europe simultaneously poses a threat to the insularity of American consciousness and offers models for American refinement and reinvention.

The variance between European and American perceptions of the world has been described at times as being conditioned by a difference in faith: a difference not necessarily religious, but rather inhering in one's presumptions about what is possible at our particular phase of human existence. Henry James states the matter well in *The Golden Bowl,* in which the Italian Prince Amerigo compares the influence of the American ingénue Maggie Verver's character on his own spirit to a scattering of exquisite drops of color, colors comprised of 'the extraordinary American good faith' (James, 2010: 462). Imprisoned by history, constrained by a culture whose own faith has long been immersed in formalism and spiraling repetition, Prince Amerigo finds his own lack of vitality thrown into disturbingly sharp relief by Maggie's innocence and imagination 'with which their relation, his and these people's was all suffused' (James, 2010: 462). Lack-

ing a better word, he tells Maggie, 'You Americans are almost incredibly romantic' (James, 2010: 462). Her response almost miraculously combines knowingness with naïveté: 'Of course we are. That's just what makes everything so nice for us' (James, 2010: 462). She adds a moment later, 'I mean we see so much' (James, 2010: 462).

The remarkable subtlety in this exchange is that both speakers get it ever so slightly wrong. What Amerigo calls romanticism is not precisely romanticism, at least not of a kind that had ever been seen before. For romanticism is a feeling experienced with regard to nature, and normally with an affinity for traditions of the past. What Amerigo perceives as American romanticism is a boisterous enthusiasm for the future, not for the past. It is an attitude, furthermore, that expresses itself in opposition to the natural world, one that has indeed reveled in the subjugation of the natural world. If one stands on one's head, one may, perhaps, find a spirit of triumph in the decimation of America's native peoples, and one may feel a crude glory in the rise of factories and smokestacks, but one is unlikely to call them romantic. A real romantic, looking upon the determined upward thrust of American skylines and the ruthless advance of American industry, would sooner be appalled than enraptured. What Amerigo calls romanticism is perhaps better seen as a want of discrimination; it is the capacity to clothe with a picturesque idealism the headlong pursuit of financial gain and worldly indulgence. If it is a spirit of romance, then the stock exchange and the dynamo have been made romantic. As for Maggie, comfortably persuaded of the 'niceness' of her world, romance consists of her unexamined conviction that niceness comes without a cost, that one can affix a smiling face to whatever wreckage has been created in the making of one's father's fortune and assume that one's good fortune arises from an odorless origin. 'We see so much', she tells Amerigo, but his infatuation does not blind him to the fact that, in truth, she sees so little.

The *faux*-Romanticism I've just described in James is, to return for a moment to Twain, a romanticism à la Tom Sawyer, the same kind of imaginative play that can turn a Sunday-school picnic into a Spanish caravan. It is a capacity to transform the banal

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into the heroic, and, it seems that this kind of heroic materialism, which was Sir Kenneth Clark's phrase for it, is the most formidable type of romance that Americans have been able to give the world and to one another. It is surely no accident that American literature is so densely populated with millionaire heroes, and that those protagonists—Christopher Newman, Silas Lapham, and above all the rest Jay Gatsby—tend to be so habitually boyish. When Gatsby sets about the simultaneously idealistic and ruthless task of constructing himself, he invents 'just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old-boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he [remains] faithful to the end' (Fitzgerald, 2004: 98). This boyishness is recognizable as boyishness in part because we tacitly compare it with places with firmer foundations; though it is evident only in glimpses, the strivers and arrivistes in *The Great Gatsby* are driven by an urge to replicate European models. Gatsby buys his mansion from the children of a man whose fond hope was to persuade the owners of the neighboring cottages to thatch their roofs with straw. Gatsby himself prizes his fleeting association with Oxford and a medal conferred by the King of Montenegro. But it is not the illusion of European sanction that empowers Gatsby and that raises him, if only for a time, above the foul dust that besmirches those around him. It is, instead, the belief that his dream actually does make him exceptional, that his errors, his excesses, and even his crimes might be excused because the vision behind them was sanctifying and pure.

Again, I haven't taken a survey, but I suspect that most Americans continue to hold in their minds a sense of their nation's peculiar sanctity—in its mission to spread democracy throughout the world, to hold itself up as what the Puritan settler John Winthrop called a city on a hill. We may argue, I suppose, about whether that sense is true or whether it ever could be true. But even if we assume that it is an illusion, an interesting argument might be made for the importance of keeping it somehow in place, because unlike Gatsby's vision it can lead to something more affirming than tinsel and glitter and conspicuous consumption. An illusion not all that different from Gatsby's has impelled America to do some remarkably

good work in the world, some of which might never have been accomplished if the nation did not imagine itself to be rather better than it is. Stripped of his illusion, Gatsby lived only hours. I sometimes fear—and often tell my students—that if America were to lose its image of itself, it, too, would just be floating in the swimming pool, waiting for the bullet.

Two months ago, in connection with another conference, I happened to visit Biloxi on the Gulf Coast of the state of Mississippi. Mississippi, of course, lies at the heart of the American South, and Biloxi is about as far south in it as one can go. The people I met there were tremendously friendly and happy to spend a long time chatting—so happy, it became apparent, because they didn't have much else to do. By some measures, Mississippi is the poorest of the fifty American states, and Biloxi residents get by on a per capita income that is about half the yearly tuition cost at a New York City private high school. Its once robust fishing and shrimping industries blighted by toxic agricultural runoff, the local economy is kept afloat by a host of gaudy, rather depressing casinos, and very little else. Its fortunes were made still worse by a direct hit in 2005 from Hurricane Katrina. I mention my visit there only because of the breakfast I had on my last day in Mississippi, at a pancake house, international in name only, on Father's Day. As I reflected on the condition of the lives of the people around me, who seemed to me to deserve quite a bit better, I saw at a nearby table a boy of about eleven years old, who struck my English professor's eye as the very image of Huckleberry Finn. He was a good-looking little fellow with sandy, reddish hair, bright, slightly mischievous eyes, and a ready smile. He seemed happy, energetic, and eager to embrace all that life might offer him. At the same table as this modern-day Huck, however, sat a man, presumably his father, who was a highly believable updating of Pap. He did not have Pap's long, stringy hair and unkempt beard or his fish-belly white complexion, but he had the modern redneck uniform: a crew cut, a prodigious beer belly, lots of tattoos, and a florid skin tone that only comes from working at a really tough job in the blazing sun. He looked at the world with an angry, suspicious squint, as if he knew

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his life so far had been a cheat and a sham and he expected more of the same.

The juxtaposition of father and son made me reflect that the unspoken tragedy of Twain's novel is the man that Huck is likely to turn into, and that poor white America was and remains a paradise of boys and a purgatory of men. The America I knew when I was a boy now seems a much older place: more cynical in its foreign policy, more peevish and recalcitrant in its government, more lethargic in its economy—old, indeed, though not as yet mature. Some Americans in our own time would like to turn away from the transatlantic looking-glass entirely, to stop making the kinds of cross-cultural comparisons I have been suggesting here. Others are still standing on tiptoes, trying to measure up to the image we observe in the somewhat untrustworthy mirror.

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BLUE WATER: A THESIS

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The so-called Blue Water principle, from which I've borrowed my title, was articulated around 1960. The context was a debate at the United Nations about decolonization. I quote a somewhat lengthy, but very useful, account by the Native American writer and activist Ward Churchill from his book *Acts of Rebellion*:

> Belgium, in the process of relinquishing its grip on the Congo, advanced the thesis that if terms like decolonization and self-determination were to have meaning, the various 'tribal' peoples whose homelands it had forcibly incorporated into its colony would each have to be accorded the right to resume independent existence. Otherwise, the Belgians argued, colonialism would simply be continued in another form, with the indigenous peoples involved arbitrarily subordinated to a centralized authority presiding over a territorial dominion created not by Africans but by Belgium itself. To this, European-educated Congolese insurgents like Patrice Lumumba, backed by their colleagues in the newly-emergent Organization of African Unity (OAU), countered with what is called the 'Blue Water Principle', that is, the idea that to be considered a bona fide colony—and thus entitled to exercise the self-determining rights guaranteed by both the Declaration and the UN Charter—a country or people had to be separated from its colonizer by at least thirty miles of open ocean. (Churchill, 2003: 19–20)

Discourse about self-determination has moved on in the past half-century, but you can understand why a Native American writer like Ward Churchill would nonetheless remain interested by what was said in 1960. The Blue Water principle defines colonialism in a narrow, restrictive way—so restrictive that many 'tribal' or, as we now say, 'indigenous' peoples would not count as having

been colonized. According to the Blue Water principle, colonialism requires sea-based conquest. It is only crossing the ocean to conquer that is scandalous, that provides a reason for outrage; what might appear to be the same condition of conqueredness and alien control, if produced without the conquerors getting their feet wet, is declared to be not a scandal at all. Thus the domination that follows land-based conquest quietly becomes normal, an unremarkable outcome of the natural course of human events, unworthy of comment or complaint.

Stop and consider. This is strange stuff. If you and your nation have not been colonized unless there are at least thirty miles of water between you and your colonizer, then Poland, say, could be colonized by Sweden if Swedish armies crossed the Baltic but not if the same armies marched *around* the Baltic. Poland could not have been colonized by neighbors like Germany or Russia. Russia's long series of conquests to its east and south does not count as colonialism at all. This would be something of a surprise to the Chechens and other indigenous peoples of the Caucasus and Siberia. You would think that the U.S'.s long series of conquests of its indigenous peoples would count, given the original arrival by sea, even if there is such a neat convergence between its nineteenth-century push westward and Russia's push eastward. But the U.S. and the other settler colonial countries could always say that they are new nations, the products of someone else's colonization rather than colonizers themselves. It was the Europeans, they could argue, who sailed across the ocean. Thus it was the Europeans who colonized, not the Americans. Let them give up their empires; in fact we hope they will. Ours is not an empire at all but merely a nation. Having acquired it by land, like the Russians and the Chinese, this nation is ours to keep, thank you very much.

By the 1980s, discussions of the rights of indigenous peoples at the United Nations were no longer mentioning blue water. The Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, passed in 2007 over the objections of the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia (objections that were subsequently withdrawn), includes self-determination among those rights and does not allude to sea crossings. But in May 2013, at the 12th annual meeting of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous

Issues, the American delegate said very firmly that, though the U.S. has now signed on to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it sees that document as non-binding, merely aspirational; the U.S. does not understand its references to the self-determination of indigenous peoples as having the same meaning or force as the concept of self-determination has in international law. In other words, mentioned or not, the Blue Water principle continues to define the legal status quo with respect to colonialism in the post-colonial era, at least as the United States understands it. This is still how certain governments decide what was and wasn't, is and isn't colonialism, what can and cannot be legitimately complained about.

I offer these initial thoughts on the Blue Water thesis as a tribute to the theme of this conference, 'Oceans Apart: In Search of New Wor(l)ds'. Among the valuable questions I imagine might have been aimed at by this choice of theme, one is to lay out new ways of thinking about the newness of the New World as opposed to the oldness of the Old World, perhaps ways that will not encourage the notorious American exceptionalism while they will allow us to recognize what is interesting enough about America to make it worth studying. That will be my aim as well. Another, related purpose the conference organizers may have had in mind was to address a new or revitalized geographical materialism, a 'geographical turn' that has even gotten itself talked about in the *New Yorker*. According to the *New Yorker*'s Adam Gopnik, where you are placed *vis-à-vis* land and sea is once again being offered as a causal explanation for various social outcomes and is therefore also having an effect on our ethics, on what can or cannot be cogently or legitimately objected to (as in the case of the Blue Water principle, though Gopnik does not mention that). We may feel some enthusiasm about how this geographical materialism challenges the culturalist paradigm, long thought universally attractive but now looking somewhat tattered. But I wonder whether we are prepared for a radical paradigm shift from 'chaps' to 'maps', as the historian and classicist Ian Morris puts it.[1] Morris has become notorious

1. On Ian Morris see Marc Perry (2013).

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in certain circles for proposing that, from the distant spatio-temporal perspective he has chosen for himself, the largest factor behind the modern decrease in daily violence is our habit of going to war. Morris himself may not favor entering into more wars—I don't know—but one practical consequence of taking his perspectival distance seriously is, if not actual war-mongering, then a disabling of the usual moral case against war-mongering. An enlarged spatial scale demands an enlarged temporal scale, and an enlarged temporal scale has a subversive effect on ordinary ethical judgments. Take for example the discussion of the Iraq War by the journalist George Packer, who helped lead the U.S. into it. Packer writes:

> Since America's fate is now tied to Iraq's, it might be years or even decades before the wisdom of the war can finally be judged. When Mao's number two, Chou En-lai, was asked in 1972 what he thought had been the impact of the French revolution, he replied, 'It's too early to tell'. Paul Wolfowitz and the war's other grand theorists also took the long view of history; if they hadn't, there never would have been an American invasion of Iraq. [...] There was no immediate threat from Iraq, no grave and gathering danger. The war could have waited. Who has the right to say whether it was worth it? (Packer, 2006: 447)

Packer does not disavow 'the long view of history', even though, as he says, those who took that view in Iraq showed 'a carelessness about human life that amounted to criminal negligence' (Packer, 2006: 448). The risk of such negligence seems built into this enlarged temporal perspective. The other, related risk, most obviously built into that perspective, is a softening of judgment on enlarged political units, such as empires, and on imperialism.

But here I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Let me go back to the seeming absurdity of the Blue Water principle. What happens if you reject that absurdity, as Ward Churchill clearly does? The alternative premise would seem to be that all colonialisms are equal, whether accomplished by land or by sea. If we throw out the Blue Water principle and declare all colonialisms equal, where does this leave us *vis-à-vis* the inhumanity of colonialism in general and of American colonialism in particular?

Perhaps you don't want to go so far. You may prefer to reject the premise that all colonialisms are equal on the grounds, say, that

capitalism is what we have in front of us, and behind and inside us, so capitalism is what we should be thinking about. The formula 'colonialism plus capitalism' may have been unspeakable in 1960, but, one might say, it does the same job that 'blue water' was asked to do then, and does it better. So why do we have to make the effort to drag modern European colonialism into the same frame as pre-modern and non-European conquests and massacres, pre-modern and non-European colonialisms, assuming you allow the term? It seems to me that there exist good reasons for doing so. One reason is the emergence of indigenous peoples as an international political movement. This movement includes, alongside the original inhabitants of the U.S. and Canada, the Berbers of Algeria and Morocco, the Masai of Kenya and Tanzania, and the Chakma people in the Chittigong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, among many others. Such a movement can no longer accuse only whites or Europeans of being colonizers. In other words, for anyone who takes the international indigenous movement seriously, colonialism can no longer be defined as an exclusively European phenomenon. I don't think we have begun to measure the ethical and political effects of this ongoing redefinition of the term—what it will mean if colonialism becomes something that non-western peoples are also guilty of, perhaps even including indigenous peoples themselves. For that matter, I don't think we have begun to take into sufficient account other causes of this semantic shift, quite apart from the political respect due to the international indigenous movement. What I'm trying to do in this essay is make a start with both of these topics.

I chose the title 'Blue Water' in part because the seeming absurdity of an absolute distinction between sea-based and land-based conquest casts immediate suspicion on the line separating European and non-European, modern and pre-modern colonialism. Suspicion is not proof, of course. I think it also matters, however, that there are 'other causes', other motives pushing us into this thought experiment. I will mention two, each of them strong enough, I think, to overcome the reluctance we may feel about seeming to lighten the moral burden that accompanies colonialism in the old, exclusively European sense.

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The first motive comes from the logic of postcolonialism itself.[2] In the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, there was a predictable rush to pay more attention to cultures that had been misrepresented, excluded, or marginalized. Little by little, this entailed recognizing that many of them, like the cultures of China and India, had canons and traditions that go back thousands of years. It is self-evident that you cannot do justice to such cultures without attending to their full history. The problem is that much of that history belongs to the period before European power had had any significant impact. Thus the great historical injury of European colonialism can at best be marginal to them. Such cases appear to be less the exception than the rule. As Alexander Beecroft has argued in *New Left Review*, the modern politicized model of European core, non-European periphery works well enough for the recent past, but it simply doesn't apply for most of the world's culture during most of the world's history. It would be temporally provincial, therefore, to take the particular inequalities and injustices of the recent past as if they were universal. The cosmopolitanism with which we are most familiar, call it cosmopolitanism in space, brings with it a corresponding cosmopolitanism in time, and this radical expansion in the time frame or temporal cosmopolitanism ends up undermining our moralized geographies.

To put this another way: postcolonialism carries within it a self-subverting impulse. The postcolonial perspective demands respect for non-European cultures that have been disrespected. But to supply the missing respect is to find oneself moving away from the postcolonial premise of a unique and defining European injury to those cultures. All cultures must be listened to. But when you listen, what do you hear? For most of them, most of the time, Europe was not what they were speaking about. And when they were, were they less prone to caricature those not like themselves than Europeans were to caricature them? Did the Persians think in less stereotypical terms of the Greeks than the Greeks thought of the Persians? I note in passing that

2. The next several paragraphs are adapted from my 'Prolegomena to a Cosmopolitanism in Deep Time', forthcoming in a special issue of *Interventions* edited by Sandra Ponzanesi.

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speaking up for hitherto silenced cultures was not Edward Said's own method in *Orientalism*, as a number of his critics complained at the time; he did not counter Western stereotypes about the East by letting Eastern cultures speak for themselves. And in retrospect, this looks like a smart move. When these cultures do speak for themselves, there is no guarantee that they will sound any more secular, or humanist, or humane in what they say about the West, or about each other, than the West has sounded when it talked about them. Would it be surprising to find appreciable amounts of misrepresentation, essentialism, and what would have to be called racism? The charge of Orientalism in reverse, or 'Occidentalism'—a symmetrical stereotyping of the West by the rest—has not been slow to arise, and it is not easy to refute. You could of course answer, as I have myself, that Orientalism was different because of the greater power it wielded. But turning from culture's content to its power would not end the conversation, especially if you were willing to talk about earlier periods, other empires, non-European empires. Is there such a thing as an empire without the coercive exercise of power—less euphemistically, without the inhumanity of slaughter, enslavement, rapine, pillage, and plunder?

Watching pre-modern and non-European empires slowly swim into scholarly focus, as I did recently at an excellent conference at the University of Massachusetts, my instinctive reaction was a certain skepticism about the political motives behind this enterprise. Why are we Americans suddenly so interested? Can this be anything but a backhanded way of letting ourselves off the hook, absolving the West of the guilt acquired during the centuries when it violently conquered and exploited so much of the planet? Preemptive self-forgiveness does seem one motive behind the new 'big history' that accompanies the return to geography. But it's obviously not the whole story. This temporal expansiveness and the moral effects that flow from it, whatever they are, are a logical if perhaps unexpected outgrowth of lines of thought that have their own autonomous momentum and command respect in their own right. The two lines of thought I've mentioned are the emergence of the indigenous movement and the logic of postcolonialism. A third is ecological.

'What enables the perception of postmodernism-as-past', Mark McGurl writes, 'is a new cultural geology, by which I mean a range of theoretical and other initiatives that position culture in a time-frame large enough to crack open the carapace of human self-concern' (McGurl, 2011: 380). For McGurl, this self-humbling geological time-frame has been forced on us by global warming and the realization (only since the year 2000) that human beings have become non-negligible factors or actors in natural history, with effects on the planet so decisive that the period since the Industrial Revolution is on its way to being renamed the Anthropocene. In the last twelve years, Greenland has lost 15 percent of its territory to global warming. McGurl cites Dipesh Chakrabarty's 2009 essay 'The Climate of History', which lists climate change among processes that 'may exist as part of this planet for much longer than capitalism or long after capitalism has undergone many more historic mutations' (Chakrabarty, 2009: 212). Common sense has long held that early non-European empires were fundamentally different creatures from later European empires because only the latter combined imperialism with capitalism. In making the case for what he calls 'deep history', history on a scale of tens or hundreds of thousands of years, Chakrabarty fights off all attempts to save the attractive hypothesis that capitalism is to blame for the state of the planet, and he makes it clear that his expanded temporal frame will necessarily result in some new global apportioning of blame, or at least a backing off from the old politics of blame, such as it was or is (Chakrabarty, 2009: 212). Chakrabarty does not say, but I will, that the struggle against capitalism today is in no way undermined by admitting, as I think we are forced to, that capitalism's degree of impact on ordinary people is not unprecedented—that earlier empires too emptied out farmland and closed off grazing land, produced ferocious transformations in the habits and possibilities of everyday life. If there is a choice of '[w]hether we blame climate change on those who are retrospectively guilty—that is, blame the West for their past performance—or those who are prospectively guilty (China has just surpassed the United States as the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, though not on a *per capita* basis)', then even if the effect

of global warming is to exacerbate existing inequalities both within and between states, blame can no longer be calculated in the same old way (Chakrabarty, 2009: 218).

For the moment, it seems to me that we have only begun to realize that blame can no longer be calculated in the same old way. We have not figured out in what new way blame might be calculated, assuming blame remains a politically necessary and appropriate concept. Where empire is concerned, therefore, what we see in the relevant scholarship is a series of vacillations between strong moral denunciation, on the one hand, and on the other—an almost shocking moral relativism.

Take for instance the book *Empire: A Very Short Introduction* by the historian Stephen Howe. Struggling with the problem of how to organize the very large subject of empire in his very short book, Howe devotes the two main chapters to 'empire by land' and 'empire by sea':

> Perhaps the most basic and important distinction is between those that grew by expansion overland, extending directly outwards from original frontiers, and those which were created by sea-power, spanning the oceans and even the entire globe. The second, mainly European kind has been the most powerful and dynamic in the modern world—roughly the last 500 years. The first, land-based form of empire, however, is by far older, and has been created by more varied kinds of people: Asians, Africans, and pre-Columbian Americans as well as Europeans. It has also proved longer lasting. The European seaborne empires were almost entirely dismantled between the 1940s and the 1970s. But the Soviet state, which collapsed only in the 1990s, is seen by many as the last great land empire. Other commentators disagree, and would say that another one still exists [...] the vast multi-ethnic political system ruled from Beijing. (Howe, 2002: 35)

One strange thing about this passage is that it doesn't explicitly include the Anglo-Saxon settler colonies—the U.S., Canada, Australia—in either category. The U.S. does come up later: 'it is the internal expansion of the continental USA [...] which evokes the most direct parallels with empire building elsewhere' (Howe, 2002: 57). If American empire-building didn't run into the same problems as British, French, or Russian imperialism, Howe says, it's because it was 'almost uniquely complete. More totally than anywhere else since the first Spanish invasions of the Americas, native peoples were physically destroyed

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or marginalized' (Howe, 2002: 59). On the one hand, the U.S. doesn't seem to count clearly on the side of either land- or sea-based empire; it can therefore enjoy the possibility, at least, that it is not colonialism at all. On the other hand, it appears as one of the most flagrant and brutal versions of colonialism in history. It cannot be long before the educational system in the U.S. is ready to teach its students the historical fact that the genocide of the Native Americans was a direct inspiration for Hitler when Hitler was planning the subjugation of Eastern Europe. I for one hope this will happen. But I have more mixed feelings about the conclusion that will no doubt be drawn if this line of influence does indeed become part of history as it is taught: that the killing and colonizing of the Native Americans is a moral analogue to the Holocaust, which is to say definitive of the worst things human beings have ever done to other human beings.

As Ward Churchill goes on to say, the obvious reason why the U.S. could make common cause with the leaders of the newly-independent African countries over the Blue Water principle is that all of them were committed to defending the autonomy of the nation-state, such as it already existed. The Africans, like the Americans, were afraid that granting further rights of self-determination to indigenous peoples or minorities within the state would cause the state to collapse:

> For either side to acknowledge that a 'Fourth World' comprised of indigenous nations might possess the least right to genuine self-determination would have been—and remains—to dissolve the privileged status of the state system to which both sides are not only conceptually wedded but owe their very existence. (Churchill, 2003: 20)

Blaming the modern state helps Churchill envisage a moral leveling or equalization between European and non-European empires, the West and the rest. This equalization is bound to be controversial; it is by no means the consensus position even for indigenous activists. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, whom Churchill cites on the topic, disagrees with it, for example. Maintaining solidarity between indigenous peoples and the former European colonies, she opts in effect to keep supporting the Blue Water principle. The Belgian proposal, she argues, was merely a West-

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ern trick, intended to destabilize the newly independent states. Thus the newly independent states were right to reject it, even if that meant sacrificing the promise of indigenous rights of self-determination, and even if it meant embracing a more or less absurd legalism. She has a point. There is of course a long tradition whereby interest by European powers in the rights of the local indigenous people could be and was cynically translated, by colonized peoples, into an imperial interest in dividing and conquering by undercutting the authority of local leaders. This is an obvious aspect, for example, of colonial British attention to the tribes of India and French solicitude for the Berbers of North Africa. (I can imagine some of my fellow Americans feeling something similar about scholarly interest in Native Americans and other U.S. racial minorities on the part of scholars based in Europe or elsewhere. There is a national or perhaps nationalist impulse to wonder why it is that these groups are so cool to non-Americans, why they possess so much cultural capital, why the foreigners are so very, very fascinated). The real question, however, is how much imperialism can be taken to explain: or, one might say, whether it is taken to explain everything that needs explaining. Churchill says imperialism's interest in indigenous people should not be decisive, and I think he's right. His global even-handedness, which spreads the responsibility between global North and the global South, both of them seen as practitioners of colonialism, has to be part of our scholarly consciousness, both when we evaluate the United States and in general.

Churchill may also be right that in 1960 and since, what the First and Third Worlds shared, at the expense of the indigenous peoples, was a commitment to the modern state form. But I am not a fan of this anti-statism. It seems to me one of the more pervasive and debilitating pathologies for which American intellectuals and American culture today need to be treated.[3] As far as indigenous peoples are concerned, politically speaking, wouldn't

3. Here we Americans can learn a great deal from Europe, with its tradition of a stronger state: one idea for this talk was to discuss Scandinavian crime series and their American television adaptations, considering all of this television—some of it quite excellent—as representation of the modern state and public meditation on its faults and virtues under present conditions.

they require a more positive understanding of the state both in order to know what their aspirations to self-determination do and do not aim at, and, in the meantime, to control their own destiny as much as possible within the states where they find themselves? My own anti-anti-statism leads me to think that the state-form has been underestimated, where indigenous people are concerned, and that the American state is flexible enough to grant more self-determination to Native Americans without suffering some sort of apocalyptic collapse.

Accusing the state allows Churchill to maintain the indigenous peoples themselves within a political binary of innocence and guilt. By being placed outside the state, they are allowed to keep the kind of innocence once associated with the 'noble savage'. There are of course solid political reasons for doing just this: for presenting the pertinent narrative, as it is presented by films like *Dances With Wolves* or *Avatar*, as innocence violated and thus waiting for revenge or redemption. After all, the historical injustice done to Native Americans is both real and ongoing, it's a fact of the present as well as the past; something must be done about it, and something can be done.

Still, the intellectual framework in which political action can be fought for is changing, and I think these changes are not all bad. Innocent victimhood is a mixed blessing. You can't hold onto it without, for example, a corresponding sacrifice of agency. So it is perhaps no surprise that other Native American writers and historians of Native American experience have taken a step beyond Churchill and have renounced it—renounced, that is, an identity first and foremost defined by their suffering of, and resistance to, the colonialism of the whites. They, too, are blurring the line between old and new, or sea-based and land-based colonialisms. Take for instance historian Ned Blackhawk's book about the Utes of the Southwest, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. Blackhawk describes his argument as follows:

> Ute adaptation in the face of imperial expansion is [...] neither celebrated nor glorified. Utes responded in kind to the shifting relations of violence sweeping throughout their homelands, redirecting colonial violence against their neighbors, Spanish and Indian alike. Carrying violence

to more distant peoples in New Mexico's expanding hinterlands, Utes attempted to monopolize the trade routes in and out of the colony while besieging neighboring groups, particularly those without horses. (Blackhawk, 2006: 6)

Ute alliances with the Spanish, Blackhawk says,

[...] carried high and deadly costs for Ute neighbors, particularly non-equestrian Paiute and Shoshone groups in the southern Great Basin, whose communities were raided for slaves by Utes, New Mexicans, and later Americans. Like their neighboring Indian and Spanish rivals, Utes remade themselves in response to the region's cycles of violence, and did so at the expense of others, as violence and Indian slavery became woven into the fabric of everyday life throughout the early West. [...] In short, before their sustained appearance in written records, Great Basin Indians endured the disruptive hold of colonialism's expansive reach, brought to them first by other Indian people. (Blackhawk, 2006: 7)

The 'in short' at the end tries to restore the firstness of colonialism, as if it were the sole and unique origin of the violence even if (as the sentence finishes) the violence was 'brought to' the basin by other Indians. But the passage clearly flirts with an omission of origin stories, for example, by making the subject of the action, if not the grammatical subject, 'the region's cycle of violence'. If the violence belongs to the region, it is not colonialism's violence to the same degree, or Europe's; at any rate they no longer possess a monopoly on it. The passage makes it hard to resist asking the question of whether there were such inequalities of violence and domination between Indian tribes before the arrival of the Europeans and of horses.

Blackhawk's aim is to get Indians into the historical record. Getting them into the record often means admitting they have committed acts that, if committed today, would be severely frowned upon. Such acts are front and center in the 2008 book *The Comanche Empire* by the Finnish historian Pekka Hämälainen. Along with systematic and deliberate campaigns of slaughter and robbery directed as much at other tribes as at Spanish officials and settlers, these acts include the active participation of Comanches in the eighteenth-century slave trade and, as part of that trade, the public rape of captive women so as to encourage the Spanish colonial authorities to continue buying the women

back. Here the presumption of innocent victimhood has disappeared completely. As Hämalainen sees them, the Comanches were colonizers themselves. Hämalainen's introduction, entitled 'reversed colonialism', begins as follows:

> This book is about an American empire that, according to conventional histories, did not exist. It tells the familiar tale of expansion, resistance, conquest, and loss, but with a reversal of historical roles: it is a story in which Indians expand, dictate, and prosper, and Europeans colonists resist, retreat, and struggle to survive. (Hämälainen, 2008: 1)

I'm no expert in that time and place; I cannot vouch for the historical details. But what he says seems roughly convincing to me, and it's clear from his abundant footnotes, to Blackhawk among others, that he is far from the only scholar to be interested in what he calls 'indigenous imperialism'. If this phrase has become sayable, then we would seem to be at an interesting moment both in how we view colonialism and in how we view the U.S.

Hämalainen is proud of the Comanches, but you couldn't exactly say that he takes their side. Focusing on their ability over more than a century to expand in territory and population, exploiting (it's his word) both the Spanish and the other Indian tribes around them, creating and controlling trade routes, quashing or subduing competition, and generally doing a great deal of what colonizers do—this is not a way of helping the Comanches formulate legal demands for restitution. On the contrary, it's a powerful example of moral relativism about empire.

Or perhaps the better phrase would be moral neutrality. It's almost refreshing, but also a bit scary, that this telling of the story offers so little sympathy for colonialism's Native American victims. The victims are losers. Could those who are slower to adapt or less adept at it really have expected anything better? On what grounds could the winners be condemned? The single largest key to the Comanches' success as colonizers, as Hämalainen sees it, is their ability to adapt to their environment, especially their natural environment (in brief: exploiting changes in climate and the new technology of the horse to move from the mountains to the plains and from a mixed lifestyle of hunting and gathering to sole dependence on hunting and the acquisi-

tion of surplus by trading and raiding). To stress environmental and evolutionary adaptation is to take a morally neutral stance toward the Comanche expansion—but also (why not?) toward expansion in general. After all, on what grounds could the same excuse be denied to the imperialism of the Europeans? Given Hämälainen's methodological materialism, moral judgment does not seem a relevant option in discussions of any form or moment of colonialism, modern or pre-modern. What matters whether you cross the plains on horses or cross the ocean on ships? In any historical period or circumstance, it is equally natural to try to exploit the advantages you have been given by your geography and your technology. The so-called 'Big History', as in David Christian's *Maps of Time*, applies the same questions to every human society from the pre-historical through the pre-modern to the post-modern. This is one form—an eco-evolutionary form—that the new cosmopolitanism in time has taken. The time frame opens up, and the pertinence of moral judgment shrinks, and *vice versa*.

In a longer version of this essay, I would have liked to speak about explorations of this expanded spatio-temporal frame which try to preserve or restore the line between European and non-European colonialisms as well as some which efface that line. It may be that the most characteristic examples are those that paradoxically do both. Consider, say, the enterprise of the still relatively new *Journal of World History*. Essays by the journal's founder, the late Jerry Bentley, manage to talk about empire-building over one thousand years, from 500 to 1500 CE, by agricultural settlers as well as by nomads, without giving words like 'empire' and 'imperial' any ethical or political inflection of the sort that would be expected if we were discussing the modern European empires.[4] If their ethical neutrality seems entirely natural and normal, I suppose it's because we assume that ethical or political judgments would be inappropriate—these people were subject to ecological or evolutionary imperatives—and/or that ethical or political judgments would be anachronistic. After all, this happened a long time ago. In that time, wasn't

4. See for example Jerry Bentley, 'Myths, Wagers, and Some Moral Implications of World History'.

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it literally unimaginable for such ethical or political judgments to be formulated? Was there any language in which they could be formulated? Could any notion exist of refraining from the full exercise of powers of conquest, with all that exercise entails, including the attendant massacres of what had not yet come to be called civilians?

Bentley claims that he is virtuously rejecting presentism by refusing to use the ethical vocabulary of the as yet unborn nation-state, the vocabulary of democracy and freedom. (For him, as for Ward Churchill, the modern state is something like the villain of the story.) Too much world history, he says, is in fact patriotic history, its endpoint something like the American democratic state. We don't want that. But does the *Journal of World History* really avoid presentism? It's true that presumably anachronistic political objections to empire have no place in his account. On the other hand, trade, circulation, cross-cultural contact, and integration, which are all ethically positive terms for us now, are also positive terms for the *Journal of World History*—in fact, they are its key terms. What it wants to show is that a kind of cross-border, or large-scale, inter-cultural contact that we value positively now but think is quite recent, actually began much longer ago. It likes the idea of a world that is united, but is trying to get it united faster, to show that it was united earlier. In this sense it is not being any less 'presentist' than anyone else, it's just dropping one set of value terms while retaining another: unity, cross-cultural contact, integration, a very American-globalist sense of peaceful integration by means of commerce. Why is it that 'cross-cultural interaction' can be a positive for us, but massacre, say, can't be a negative? From the perspective of core-periphery, West/rest models, the *Journal of World History* is trying to equalize things, but Bentley equalizes them by eliminating the element of coercion on both sides. Empire is not about coercion; it's about the free circulation of commodities. In offering us one thousand years of empire, but with not one drop of blood to be seen, it is offering us a picture of globalization today exactly as its champions wish to imagine it: all commerce, creative interaction, and free choice, with no coercion anywhere.

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This is much the same point that Gaurav Desai makes in his reading of Amitav Ghosh's non-fiction book *In an Antique Land*, which made Ghosh famous when it came out in 1992. At the heart of Ghosh's retrieval of pre-European cosmopolitanism, however, Desai finds a 'romance with free-market economics and the minimalist state' (Desai, 2004: 134). If one assumes that it was 'only with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 that violence enters the Indian Ocean trade', that it was only at that late date 'that the unarmed, pacifist traditions of commerce were disrupted', then of course one will overlook rivalries and conflict between rulers of Indian Ocean states (Desai, 2004: 136). But this is simple idealization, Desai concludes: 'It may be true, as Ghosh suggests, that before the arrival of the Europeans no political power in the Indian Ocean ultimately succeeded in dictating the terms of trade, but it was not for lack of trying' (Desai, 2004: 136). Then as now, states tried to use political and military power to dictate the terms of trade. Inhumanity, if that is the right word, did not begin with the arrival of the European ships.

According to historian Roxani Eleni Margariti, to whom I owe the Desai reference, this is a large-scale phenomenon: scholars erase aggression, especially aggression supervised and funded by states, from the zones of pre-modern, non-European cosmopolitanism—a cosmopolitanism, usually based on maritime trade, that it is now highly fashionable to discover, explore, and celebrate. Thus recorded moments of violence at sea are presented as piracy—casual, incidental, unorganized. It's as if the sea somehow disabled the state's attempt to wield power, as if water were a state-resistant element. Yet this runs counter to the facts, Margariti says. A great deal of what was happening in the Indian Ocean was 'stak[ing] out of a claim over littoral and maritime space and routes, in other words, [...] "mark[ing] water" in Emily Sohmer Tai's felicitous phrase' (Margariti, 2008: 545). Blue water was claimed, in effect, as territory. In a very real sense, surf was turf. And turf was violently fought over.

A cynical reading might conclude that, even when the apparent point is to present non-Europeans as natural pacifists, in profound contrast to the appropriative European empires,

the deeper motive is to rehabilitate American and European empire—not directly, but by delegitimating the terms of moral scrutiny usually applied to it. Those terms can be delegitimated by simply speaking and acting as if they did not apply to non-European empires. The implication will follow little by little that these terms don't apply at all—that they are no longer serviceable, or no longer needed. In showing that pre-modern non-Europeans were more like us Americans, it forgives them their sins—the sorts of bad behavior that once upon a time would have gotten them called 'barbarians'—but does so within an immense exercise of self-forgiveness. It's not clear here that abandoning a power-laden core-periphery model for neutral-sounding talk of decentered 'networks' represents any moral or political improvement. One would not like to think that the conceptual fashion for 'networks' has arisen so as to discourage us from realizing that coercion was a decisive part of the history of empires, and remains decisive today. But this may also be one hidden intention behind the turn from economic to environmental metaphors, another aspect of the new expansion of temporal scale. Because the environment is itself such an urgent ethico-political issue, you never notice that the 'ethico-political' and the dynamic of power to which it responds are suddenly missing, evacuated not just from the *account* you are reading, but from the *kind of account* you are reading.

Nevertheless, I find I can't quite decide that this expansion of geographical and temporal perspective about empire is intended simply to permit Americans to forgive themselves for their own empire-building, whether by territorial conquest or by deterritorialized commerce. It seems worth speculating that the U.S. may be coming to think in larger units of time.[5] The many voices that have announced the rise of Asia and the decline of American hegemony have perhaps done America a good service in the sense of getting us out from under the old idea that we are meant to be the glory and instructor of the world. My own provisional

5. This is something that I would have shown in the fiction of people like Jennifer Egan and Junot Diaz, in particular their use of prolepsis, not because it is thinking with imperial arrogance but on the contrary because it can finally begin to see itself as an empire in decline, like so many others before it.

thesis about the absurdly long run that the Blue Water principle has had and about the tendency to overrule it is that, in the end, the U.S. does not turn out to be the most consistently evil power that ever existed, or indeed a totally exceptional one. But it does continue to be interesting, if interesting in ways that overlap with the interestingness of other countries and other empires.

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'THE WORLD OF MADE IS NOT THE WORLD OF BORN': America and the Edge of the Continent

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I gazing at the boundaries of granite and spray, the established
sea-marks, felt behind me
Mountain and plain, the immense breadth of the continent, before
me the mass and doubled stretch of water.
Robinson Jeffers, 'Continent's End'

At the beginning of his great 1927 poem *Women at Point Sur,* Robinson Jeffers offers a harsh judgment of the American mind as a producer of a culture of avoidance or evasion. In Jeffers' words, 'You chose to ignore consciousness, incredible how quickly / The American mind short-circuits by ignoring its object. / Something in the gelded air of the country' (Jeffers, 1927: 26). It is a commentary on the conversation that Reverend Barclay has just had with a boy working at a hotel, and whose opinion as to a possible existence of God he is asking. Since there comes no answer to the interrogation, 'Do you think there's a God?', and the young man does not seem to have an opinion at all, these circumstances occasion Reverend Barclay's angry dismissal of America not as incidentally empty of interest in the transcendental but as purposefully choosing such ignorance. America bespeaks double ignorance: 1) it ignores consciousness (which, for Jeffers, stands for the ability to live and investigate life in a most serious manner), and 2) this ignorance leads to the second type of evasion—America, in avoiding all the seriousness of life and developing new strategies of disarming life's seriousness, avoids itself, voids itself, ignores its own object. What is serious

in life, what makes life serious, why life IS serious, has been eliminated from the American life, which therefore presents itself as 'gelded', i.e., deprived of what is essential for life to happen.

Life in what Jeffers refers to as 'America' develops in the aura of a certain vital lack that makes this life almost a parody of existence. Life conceived under the auspices of 'something gelded' is monstrous or phantasmatic, and this spectrality can be documented upon the level of the self ('consciousness'), the state ('America'), and God. Each of these phantasms turns its own existence into a peculiar kind of imprisonment in which what Jeffers repeatedly names 'inexhaustible life, incomparable power, inhuman knowledge' changes into no more than a 'blind adventure' (Jeffers, 1927: 90, 21). In consequence, the solidity of the structure called 'America', its 'wall-ed' streets, and mansions that advertise the present and future prosperity are now revealed to be constructions of spectral urbanity and phantomatic architecture. As Reverend Barclay contends, 'Sticks plastered, cloth, books, what they call a home; / Framed to wall out the wild face of eternity' (Jeffers, 1927: 23). Jeffers avows then that 'America' is a project, the heart of which was the ambition to conquer wilderness (hence the mythology of the frontier and pioneer). The project backfired, or short-circuited, because, while successfully eliminating the natural wild, it has forsaken the existential wild, which must always be kept and preserved as a condition of existence. 'America' grows as the Enlightenment project of the civilizing illumination which compromises itself by 'enlightening' the world to such a degree that it has neglected the necessary 'dark' mysteriousness that is necessary for life to flourish.

America, then, would answer all the conditions which Jan Patočka sets for the politics of the inexorable 'rule of the day' which runs the world more and more profoundly into war. Thus, life has become 'exhausted', power has devolved to become a mere game of comparison and formulating competitive promises, and knowledge has been reduced to the domain of human-all-too-human. Thus, to redeem 'America' one ought to undertake a threefold mission of 1) thinking and living life as 'inexhaustible', 2) reinventing politics in a manner that discloses a possibility

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of another organization of social life not outside but within the very social texture (politics which would demonstrate some 'outside', some 'sense as an outside that is opened right in the middle of the world, right in the middle of us and between us as our common sharing out' [Nancy, 2010: 18]), and 3) working upon epistemologies that would reconnect the human with the non-human. Right in the middle of the countercultural turmoil of 1967, Norman O. Brown professed in his Harvard lecture such a vision of the redeemed America: 'My utopia is / an environment that works so well / that we can run wild in it / anarchy in an environment that works' (Brown, 2008: 207). The environment in question is a well-organized network of 'all public utilities' which are fundamental factors in bringing about what Brown calls 'unification', a new type of community, a new type of a social body, 'love's body', which empowers individuals rather than the abstract system. This 'unification' is an ethical-technological-aesthetic project, a work of such teachers in utopian engineering as John Cage and Buckminster Fuller, of which modern or postmodern 'globalization' seems to be an unwieldy caricature.

To undertake this mission of recasting being, acting, and knowing, one has to remain firmly within the world without, at the same time, unreservedly endorsing its rules and constitutions. Such a position makes affirmation of being possible through the practice of the Nietzschean *Ja-sagen*, which, however, has nothing to do with plain general commensurability and acceptance of the state of things. In his 1940 collection *Fifty Poems*, e. e. cummings, having determined a synonimity between knowledge and appropriation ('all knowing's having and have is (you guess) / perhaps the very unkindest way to kill'), puts forward the following claim: 'so we'll/ not have (but i imagine that yes is / the only living thing) and we'll make yes' (cummings, 1991: 528). The affirmation in question is a particular way of making the world that is not reduced to fabricating things and goods and which is closer somehow to un-making of them. 'yes' (a small letter is necessary) is a true making, not mere fabricating or manufacturing. The un-making that we are talking about is far from being a destruction or sheer dismantling. We could approach it as a double process. First, it disturbs and unbalances

our perception of what is, thus destabilizing the object and blurring its identity. Second, it breaks a strong connection that has always existed between knowing and having; knowledge, as it developed in the Western *episteme*, has always imposed a network of proprietary relationships upon reality. If knowledge was the royal way of knowing, then very quickly it energized the complicated and dynamic structure of power and appropriation, which needed sciences to determine possessions, locations, territories, and zones of influence. 'yes', as it perforates this texture, as it turns objects into fuzzy appearances, as it undermines having as a criminal gesture ('the unkindest way to kill'), demonstrates things in their very existential matter not as instrumentally useful objects but as the very manifestation of being ('is the only living thing'). This is a move away from the 'government of men' towards the 'government of things'; we shall soon return to this phrase of Georges Bataille. Or, in cummings's words, it is a recognition that 'a world of born is not a world of made'. What lives is a 'yes' that breaks and opens up an object, affirms it without accepting it, as it is, with a premonition of some 'elsewhere' that a given object makes visible but that also undoes the object. We are very close to what Giorgio Agamben describes as a 'truly singular' fact about human existence, which 'is the silent and impervious intertwining of the two works, the extremely close and yet disjointed proceedings of the prophetic word and the creative word, of the power of the angel (with which we never cease producing and looking ahead) and the power of the prophet (that just as tirelessly retrieves, undoes, and arrests the progress of creation and in this way completes and redeems it)' (Agamben, 2011: 49). cummings's recognition that 'progress is a comfortable disease' seems to endorse this diagnosis, which combines the inevitability of making with the equally exigent force of undoing (cummings, 1991: 554).

In the poem that is a coda to the *50 Poems* volume, the 'yes' (let us never forget—'the only living thing') is quite literally a synonym of living and, at the same time, a basis for a certain new politics of freedom. Liberation is portrayed not in terms of a specific class structure or political struggle, but the way in which it infiltrates and energizes the very life (what the poet

refers to as 'our pure living') of every human individual. Here is e. e. cummings: 'what freedom's not some under's mere above / but breathing yes which fear will never no?' (cummings, 1991: 538). The task of reinventing politics hinges upon the carnalization of freedom; the politics of un-making depends upon freedom which, independent of the law, is first of all guaranteed by the lived experience of the body. Freedom is embodied, otherwise it is a mere token in the political game; it is, as cummings puts it in a later poem, 'freedom: what makes a slave' (cummings, 1991: 834). Thus, freedom cannot be enforced but has to be lived in a fully and literally biological way; it belongs to the protocol of such final bodily functions as breathing. What is more, this kind of freedom, the embodied freedom of 'yes', is not vulnerable to the actions of the apparatus of power, as it lies outside the realm of force and enforcement. It is, as cummings emphasizes, freedom that 'fear will never no'. The phonetic ambiguity is priceless: embodied freedom, the bio-freedom, is beyond the reach of the mental modalities of knowledge ('know') as a means of enforcing a certain (to use Immanuel Wallerstein's concept) 'system world', neither can it be negated ('no') by fear which, as we learn from further lines in the same poem, leaves us within a set of substitutions: 'hate' supersedes 'wisdom', 'doubt blind the brave', 'mask' stands in for 'face'.

To use a category worked out by Jean-Luc Nancy, we could describe such affirmatively un-making 'yes' as 'adoration'. Adoration is an expression of reverence and veneration for the object that functions in the structure of our aims and needs, but this kind of respect owes its unique status and power to the fact that it is, at the same time, a prayerful meditation on what takes this object away from these aims and needs defined by our organization of life. The very process of 'un-making' suggests that the object is never complete and finished, never filled solidly and uninterruptedly with matter, but there open in it some mysterious holes and ruptures which, potentially at least, remove the thing from the realm of human manufacturing. The human is punctured by the non-human; the making of the thing always inherently has within it the power of un-making; thus the thing is never 'made' unless it is open to being permanently un-made.

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The particle 'un-' marks the appearance of a certain 'nothing' from which the thing is being constantly created anew. Hence, Nancy is well justified in his claim that 'adoration is addressed to this opening. Adoration consists in holding onto the *nothing*—without reason or origin—of the opening. It is the very fact of this holding on' (Nancy, 2013:15). e. e. cummings turns out to be a great American practitioner of a 'yes' that is the adoration of what makes the human world but refuses to be contained in it and by it. To know what is 'the only living thing', to practice the (un-)making power of 'yes' that is a form of adoration, we have to emancipate ourselves from the modalities of the human, as cummings would put it, from knowing and having. Only then will we able to contend that 'yes is a pleasant country' (cummings, 1991: 578).

This is a perspective assumed by the poet in the poem we have been reading. Its first line announces, in the critical turn, the whole project of emancipation: human existence ('who we are') and actions ('why we dream', 'how we drink crawl eat walk die fly do') cannot be meaningfully envisioned within the framework of the aforementioned modalities. As we learn from the early section of the poem 'a peopleshaped toomanyness far too' will never be able to answer the questions that have been relegated by these modalities to the domain of banality or forgetfulness. A 'peopleshaped toomany-ness' reveals the most essential characteristics of our present situation which, for the sake of brevity, can be summarized as a total humanization of the world that has acquired the human 'shape' even in the sphere of natural phenomena. This process has caused a dramatic change in the way that man is situated in the whole project of creation: loneliness has been replaced by crowdedness, the lack and moderation by excess, and too little has become 'too many' which, as its abstract form 'toomany-ness' reveals, presents itself as an overwhelming scheme that Immanuel Wallerstein calls 'system world'. The ultimate consequence of such a situatedness of the human individual is that he/she is being translated into a realm that allows for living without being anchored in existence, a life that blurs the distinction between life and death disfiguring the human connection. As cummings phrases it, 'a notalive undead too-nearishness'.

What the poet formulates in the rhetoric of excess ('toomany-ness', 'too-nearishness') is the world in which everything is 'far too', i.e., a world subjected to human ambition and desire, a world of hasty activism in which un-making has been suppressed and misrepresented as a negative and passively destructive schemer against the interests of making/fabricating. All these insights much later have been taken up by the philosopher claiming that, 'We are now, admittedly, the masters of the Earth and of the world, but our very mastery seems to escape our mastery. We have all things in hand, but we do not control our powers' (Serres, 1995: 171).

To save ourselves, to redeem America and Americans, we have to overcome the regime of 'far too' that eventually leads us, as cummings has it, to the point where 'climbing hope meets most despair' (cummings, 1991: 528). Nancy accentuates that adoration, understood as the way of responding to the openings of nothing within the very texture of living, must reduce the hubristic ambitions of men: 'Adoration therefore carries itself with a certain humility'. This humility, having nothing to do with humiliation, implicates us in the politics of un-making, the model of which is to be found in God's creation of the world *ex nihilo*, i.e., 'of the most humble, of almost nothing, with no regard for what is powerful and remarkable' (Nancy, 2013:15). Such redemptive politics, one has to say right at the very beginning, will always be in the making, will never be complete and consummated, as the force of the particle 'un-' is constantly burrowing within it. Politics of bio-freedom is politics in the un-making. Norman O. Brown makes the link between freedom and unfinishedness explicit: 'Can we liberate instead of repress / Can we find a way of being permanently unstable' (Brown, 2008: 206). A visionary, utopian politics happens at the moment when actual dating falls into the dateless time of the conditional. As cummings was to put it much later, in his last poetic book, 'at the magical hour / when is becomes if' (cummings, 1991: 802). Mocking the precise temporalities of the calendar in the non-time of metamorphosis, what takes place at this particular non-time is a critical collapse of the rule of the regime of 'far too'. For cummings, this crisis of the system world occurring in the non-time of 'if' exposes us

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to the mysteriousness of being alive. This comeback of the enigma of living, of living as the enigmatic process, constitutes a deadly threat to the world of 'a peopleshaped toomany-ness'. A clown distributing daisies 'one a winter afternoon' 'on eighth street' is what 'mostpeople fear most: / a mystery(first and last) / mostpeople fear most: / a mystery for which i've / no word except alive /—that is, completely alert / and miraculously whole' (cummings, 1991: 802).

The phrase 'when is becomes if' is equivocal: it transfers us to some nonthinkable temporality substituting the precisionist 'when' with most ambiguous 'if', but it also problematizes the very fundamental verb we use to name our own being. 'When is becomes if' names also the moment when we tear down the illusion of being, when, as e. e. cummings says in another poem, we stop taking the mask for the face. But in both cases what is essential is breaking through the standard protocols of perceiving and knowing the world. What has been solid now melts, and the reality usually looking for the expression in the indicative mood is being subversively replaced by the conditional (a move to which cummings frequently takes recourse), baring the illusory qualities of what we have assumed to be the 'world'. At the same time, it sketches a vision of a world which is not but which should be. The 'if' mode into which e. e. cummings switches his thinking aims at a peculiar kind of exodus: its mission is to lead us out of the land in which ontological forgetfulness and misconception concerning being alive sanctions the political and social organization. This is the heart of cummings's diagnosis of what Hegel would call 'the state of the world': under-existence of the human individual is matched by the over-existence of the political machinery. The dramatically weakened sense of living, the impairment of what it means to live, a certain ontological debilitation—all this is grasped in phrases that try to name them as a state of 'a notalive undead' or 'unbeingdead isn't beingalive' (cummings, 1991: 528, 803). As cummings phrases it in another poem, this is a situation where 'being pay[s] the rent of seem'. America is the place of an awkward economy of existence in which to 'be' remains in debt to what only 'seems' to be, and as this credit has certainly

to be paid back America has less and less of the authentic life and more and more of the simulacrum of life. In another poem, cummings turns this life debilitating credit into the very basis of the distorted system world: 'as freedom is a breakfastfood / or truth can live with right and wrong / or molehills are from mountain made /—long enough and just so long / will being pay the rent of seem' (cummings, 1991: 511).

In his final collection, cummings coins yet another lapidary locution that describes this situation. He speaks about a 'subhuman superstate' (cummings, 1991: 803), and the tension between the particles 'sub-' and 'super' is telling. On the one hand, we have everything that is 'below', 'under' or 'slightly' (all associated with 'sub-'); on the other, there are things, attitudes, and features that go 'above', 'beyond' everything that has been added to and is supernumerary with regard to what presents itself as a standard or means. 'America' then is less than human and more than human at the same time: less human because it effected among its population what Tennyson famously called the state of 'lotus-eaters', a forgetfulness of being alive, and more than human because it replaced the merely human with the abstract construction of state violence. It is by far unsatisfactory on the level of 'sense' and excessive on that of economy and political organization. With the economic teachings of John Maynard Keynes in mind, Jean-Luc Nancy helps us to understand that 'subhuman superstate' refers to unconditional preferences for economic thinking in terms of means that have shaped Western thinking and society. Thus, he admonishes us in the way that cummings would certainly approve:

> [...] we should not start with economy itself or with its regulations, but with 'ends', or rather 'sense'—let us therefore say simply with metaphysics, or, if one prefers, with the terms *mysticism* or *poetics.* But whichever name one chooses, we must start with the work of thinking through these names, the regime of names, the relation to infinite sense. (Nancy, 2013:83)

This is to be read in conjunction with two aspects of the American line of life. First is a constant suspicion that thinking or metaphysics is not pertinent for modern democracy, which is not nourished by its concerns and dilemmas. The suspicion was

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voiced already by Alexis de Tocqueville and more recently by Stanley Cavell, who combines the question of 'why America has never expressed itself philosophically' with a difficulty in classifying the most important American minds as 'philosophers': 'Why has America never expressed itself philosophically? [...] the context of the question implied that I was taking the question of American philosophical expression to be tied up with the question whether Thoreau (and Emerson) are to be recognized as philosophers' (Cavell, 1988: 11). The second line somewhat capitalizes on this difficulty of drawing clear boundaries and connects the political with the aesthetic. In his revision of modern philosophy, Norman O. Brown sees the chances for 'unification' in the degree to which the Dionysian principle overcomes the matter-of-factness of political reason: 'Breaking down the boundaries is breaking down the reality principle / unification lies beyond the reality-principle / the communion is Dionysian'(Brown, 2008: 206). Having asked a question similar to Cavell's 'What kind of language might be helpful?', Brown answers: 'instead of morality, metaphor [...] the language of healing, or making whole is not psychoanalysis, but poetry' (Brown, 2008: 213).

What is at stake, then, is the way in which we are to confront the 'subhuman superstate' that is the organization of social and political life trying to harness the original chaos and fortuitousness of living, the adventure of being alive, with the preordained rules and regulations of the market and political struggle. Political life dominating in the present remains in an awkward position towards man's existential challenge. As cummings puts it succinctly, 'a politician is an arse upon / which everyone has sat except a man' (cummings, 1991: 550). Attempting to investigate reasons for which man has been profoundly betrayed by politics, cummings gives us five precise lessons of what is wrong with the society of 'subhuman superstate'. First is a combination of what he previously termed as 'a peopleshaped toomany-ness' and the language that merely reiterates familiar grammatical constructions reproducing, in turn, equally familiar structures of the world. 'Toomany-ness' needs a discourse operating rigorously predictable constructions that guarantee unquestionable correctness of expression, a correctness that can be easily checked

and, if need be, quickly brought back to order. A conceivable exodus from 'subhuman superstate' must imply a discourse mixing forms, genders, registers, and which, in the Nietzschean mode, cherishes mistake as a figure of truth. The first lesson taught by cummings returns us towards the power of the poetic and reads, '(1) we sans love equals mob / love being youamiare' (cummings, 1991: 803).

The second lesson transports us to the realm of metaphysics and posits a reshuffling of the order and hierarchy of things assumed by the society ('from second to tenth rate'), which alteration brings about a rediscovery of the largely forgotten significance of what T.S. Eliot famously rendered as the 'overwhelming question'. Here is cummings again: '(2) the holy miraculous difference between / firstrate & second implies nonth / inkable enormousness by con / trast with the tiny stumble from second to tenth / rate' (cummings, 1991: 803). What belongs to the rationally organized and enforced order of 'subhuman superstate' is 'tiny' as opposed to the unconcealed mysteriousness of the difference between the created ('firstrate') and the man-made ('second'). One has to realize that, as cummings maintains in another place, 'A world of made / is not a world of born' (cummings, 1991: 554). The difference is called 'holy miraculous' not because it builds a radical distinction between the two, but because it tries to find out how one always works within the other. As Giorgio Agamben says, 'poetry, technology, and art are the inheritors of the angelic work of creation. Through the process of secularization of the religious tradition, however, these disciplines have progressively lost all memory of the relationship that has previously linked them so intimately to one another' (Agamben, 2011: 5). What e. e. cummings points out is the second directive of our exodus from 'subhuman superstate': we will be able to get going only if, aware of the difference between 'firstrate and second' rather than the insignificant distinctions of the hierarchies that organize our social and economic policies, we also change our epistemologies in such a way that knowing will reclaim the lost memory linking the divine and the secular.

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Lesson number three retrieves the importance and necessity of the error for being alive, this time transferring it from the linguistic to the theological. Lucidity of thinking is prepared by the sincerity of transgression: '(3) as it was in the begin / ning it is now and always will be or / the onehundredpercentoriginal sin / cerity equals perspicuity' (cummings, 1991: 803). This clearly dovetails with the postulate to meditate upon the 'nonthinkable enormousness' as the very notion of enormousness (which in another text cummings refers to as the 'immeasurable is' [cummings, 1991: 521]). This lesson expropriates the scientific-logical approaches that have always been used in the Western tradition to characterize thinking. The fourth lesson is that of the necessity of independent thinking ('Only the Game Fish Swims Upstream'), while the fifth one resounds the warning signal against a spectral life which the 'subhuman superstate' imposes upon man ('unbeingdead isn't beingalive'). Thus further directives that need to guide us in our exodus are: retrieving a thinking that will problematize the instrumentality of our tele-techno-scientific epistemologies and modes of notation (cumming's typography prompts us to believe that 'nonthinkable' is also non-inkable) and help to identify and exorcize the spectral element which not only haunts but plainly takes over and dominates our living. The critique of the 'subhuman superstate' thus entails a necessary foray into the domain of what Jacques Derrida called 'hauntology'.

The conditional introduced by 'if' opens a certain non-time, or, perhaps, it would be more accurate to say that it introduces some kind of future different from what we regularly refer to as a future event. That is, the future of the 'if' structure both promises the continuity and denies the calendar sequence. It 'promises' by the very fact that it projects some different state of things. It separates such state in time from what is going on now by moving it to some indescribable moment of time; it denies, as facts taking place within 'if' are merely shadows of real, matter-of-fact occurrences, they exist in such a weak mode that they are mere shadows, figments of wild imagination or a trick of rationality that has all of a sudden lost control of its matter-of-factness. 'If' sends us not so much

to a future understood as what will happen tomorrow, or next year, but to some indescribable futurity bereft of standard measures of dating. If 'future' basically consists in being loyal to the past standards of time, 'futurity' announces a kind of time liberated from such previous loyalties. The 'if' construction of the world implies, as we have noticed after Agamben, a constant action and counteraction of the poetic and the prophetic, of a promise and a denial, of ethical brotherhood on the one hand and the liberty and equality manipulatively involved in the political game on the other. Of such futurity speaks William Blake in a passage from *Vala, or the Four Zoas:*

> Why roll thy clouds in sick'ning mists? I can no longer hide
> The dismal vision of mine eyes. O love & life & light!
> Prophetic dreads urge me to speak: futurity is before me
> Like a dark lamp. Eternal death haunts all my expectation.
> Rent from Eternal Brotherhood we die & are no more
> (Blake, 1797: V, 3, 71–76)

For David Herbert Lawrence, America posits precisely the problem of futurity which, disentangled from the past, is searching its forms of materialization. If Europe stands for a 'future' understood as a reiteration of the past (of what Lawrence refers to as 'tradition' [Lawrence, 1972: 774]), America faces a 'futurity', i.e., a future that not only cannot be understood in terms of the past ('it is easy enough to be faithful to a tradition') but cannot, in fact, find a form for itself. Futurity of America, unlike future of Europe, is deprived of structures, or at least its structures are unknown and unthinkable. Lawrence speaks of 'an unrevealed future', 'an unborn future', 'as-yet-unknowable American future'—formulations not so much referring to the uncertain character of events to come but, more significantly, accentuating the fact that the very criteria and categorizations that normally allow us to think up and of a future lose all their weight. Thus, not only do we not know what a future will bring about but – a much more dramatic caesura—we have no categories and measures that would allow us to invent and draw a map of such a future. As Lawrence says, what we call futurity of America is 'Not a mob thing, nor a mass thing, nor a class thing, nor a hundred-per-cent thing / But a subtle, struggling little germ struggling

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half-unrealised in individual hearts, and nowhere else' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). We should certainly mark the unreadiness of America that looms like a vision rather than a fully articulated project. America is not 'a hundred-per-cent thing', i.e., it cannot be captivated by itself, functioning for two centuries as a destination for generations of migrants, it has to lose itself as a destination point. People have flocked to America to establish their future there, and, paradoxically, to secure this aim America has to disestablish, undo its own future, dismantle the solidity of its metaphysical foundations and the political, economic and social structures erected upon them.

What characterizes the futurity of America is a peculiar situatedness of the human element. The magisterial role of history always presenting itself as a collection of lessons helping men to think up their future has been radically reduced: we learn from Lawrence's text that, 'America will have to find her own way into the future, / the old lights won't show the way' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). If history, which allows for the construction of a future, follows the dictate of the 'old lights', America and its futurity clearly do not belong to this regime (as e. e. cummings puts it, 'all history's a winter sport or three' [cummings, 1991: 579]). Robinson Jeffers is probably most extreme in voicing his violent abdication from human history. Having, in one of his suppressed poems, metaphorized humanity as 'the semi-delirious patient' who has amassed heavy 'lumber' of wars, the poet determines the crucial question as an investigation concerning how much of this human experience will be carried into the future: 'The question is / How much all this amazing lumber the pale convalescent / Staggering back towards life will be able to carry up the / steep gorges that thrid the cliffs of the future?' (Jeffers, 1977: 162). The world needs futurity rather than a 'future', the openness to the nonhuman rather than a hopeless confinement to the vicious circle of human history in which 'Roosevelt, Hitler and Guy Fawkes / Hanged above the garden walks, / While the happy children cheer, / Without hate, without fear, / And new men plot a new war' (Jeffers, 1977: 156).

A withdrawal from human history and its basic concepts always operating on the large scale such as 'mass', 'mob', 'class'

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moves us towards the domain of *bios,* life which does not recognize a difference between the individual and the mass. When Lawrence repeatedly speaks about the 'germ of that future [which] is inside the American people', the germ that is 'little' and 'struggling', he seems to make two important gestures (Lawrence, 1972: 775). The first allows him to reach out towards life that exists in its potential only; life is a germ that gathers within it forces ready to start growing but yet dormant. Thus, futurity of America belongs to a kind of life that has not begun yet; America is a life-to-come, its 'future' is precisely a 'futurity' because we can only know or intuit its potential, never fully realized form. The second gesture amplifies this ambiguity by pointing out that this life-to-come which is futurity of America is a manifestation of the potency for growing and germinating and, at the same time, of a most serious threat against itself. A germ is the strongest promise of life exuberant and, simultaneously, a menacing microorganism, a bacteria, which may at any moment disempower and cancel this promise. Futurity of America is both an invitation and deterrent, hospitality and hostility, futurity of puissance and deadly illness.

The expression 'life-to-come' as the rendition of futurity of America is equivocal in itself. The secret of futurity of America, as Lawrence divulges, consists in reversing the normal sequence of events and also in the undoing of the machinery of 'progress' as conceived by the Enlightenment tradition. In the end, the future of America, its futurity, is, paradoxically, a denial of what is to come. As Lawrence explains, America must free itself from its own image as construed by others, by the world that 'calls upon America to act in a certain way' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). It must never 'acquiesce'; Americans are loyal to their futurity which, however, is not 'to come', but which has to, reading e. e. cummings again, 'undream a dream' of America (cummings, 1991: 556). In a significant passage, D.H. Lawrence juxtaposes various nations that have constituted America and the native Indian population: 'Turn the Poles, the Germans, the English, the Italians, the Russians, / Turn them into hundred-per-cent Americans. / What else have they come to this country for? / But the Indians never came. / It was you who came, Americans'

(Lawrence, 1972: 777). What threatens America and its futurity is it being overwhelmed and dominated by 'hundred-per-cent Americans', by those who 'came' attracted by the dream that now, if America is to redeem itself, has to be 'undreamed'. The risk of America is precisely 'America' itself with its dreams of 'ideal' state and superpower status with their protocols remaining within the regime of knowing characterized by its endless, limitless ambitions (the Snowden affair is a clear demonstration of the hubristic desires of the American state to know absolutely everything regardless of civil rights and political and economic costs). The 'Indian' that Lawrence eulogizes (although, to be fair, he warns us not 'to sentimentalize about him' [Lawrence, 1972: 776]) represents the 'savage' (a word used by Lawrence himself) edge at which the human (with its unstoppable march of 'progress' and the system world built round the notion of equivalence) becomes intertwined with the nonhuman (or what the poet refers to as 'the remnant of the old race' [Lawrence, 1972: 779]). In e. e. cummings's poetic universe, the 'savage' obtains the name of 'love', the role of which is to undo the fabrications of the instrumental mind: 'love's function is to fabricate unknownness' (cummings, 1991: 446). The 'unknownness' in question is not a mere critique of the scientific mind, but a radical undoing of the whole Weltanschauung of the system world as represented by 'America' with its disfigured life, distorted epistemologies, and the dictate of the *hoi polloi*. In cummings's words, 'life's lived wrongsideout, sameness chokes oneness / truth is confused with fact' (cummings, 1991: 446). Both Lawrence and cummings warn us against the conflation of a certain type of apodictic sovereignity of the model state called 'America', a sovereignty jealously assigned to itself and projected as a general model to be imitated and exported.

This warning call derives from the inability to define what is, in fact, 'America'. We have learned so far that 'America' can be seen more as a vision than as an accomplished project, that it has to protect itself from its own completion because only on this condition can it act on behalf of its futurity, which does not belong to the domain of simply what is to come but to what is to be undone. Despite its economic, military,

and technological advancement, America has to rediscover its 'savageness', or the 'Indian', which is a subversive force dismantling and deconstructing the sphere of political and social stability preventing us from taking it at its face value. But also, we should note, that Lawrence and cummings offer a new interpretation of the human individual subject, a new version of the famous Emersonian principle of self-reliance. The British poet clearly expounds the centrality of the individual subject for futurity of America; he speaks about 'a speck, a germ of American future in the heart of every intelligent American' (Lawrence, 1972: 775). But this subject is already being eaten out by a germ that is nourishing him/her: the subject grows only on the condition that it ceases to be self-enclosed, that it is not a 'hundred-per-cent American', i.e., that it be open to the 'savage', or 'love', or thoughtful engagement in the undreaming of a dream. Thus, the community, as Roberto Esposito perceptively notices, 'isn't joined to an addition but to a subtraction of subjectivity', meaning that 'its members are no longer identical with themselves but are constitutively exposed to a propensity that forces them to open their own individual boundaries in order to appear as what is "outside" themselves' (Esposito, 2010: 138). As Esposito professes in the same passage, this also implies a refutation of the 'sameness' which, as cummings argued, is one of the principal features of the deformed life of 'America', as a certain type of dominating sovereignty: 'If the subject of community is no longer the "same", it will by necessity be an "other"; not another subject but a chain of alterations that cannot ever be fixed in a new identity' (Esposito, 2010: 138).

What is at stake is not an assent towards 'America' but a thoughtful dissent, not acquiescence (D.H. Lawrence's term) but defiance, if not disobedience, towards 'America'. A certain retraction, hesitation, and reservation must be positions taken towards 'America' not by its European or Asian partners but by America itself. This is a Derridean calculation concerning America energized by 'reservations about its internal and foreign policies, about its jealously guarded sovereignty and its apparent disdain for international law and institutions, reservation about America that, as Peggy Kamuf so aptly puts it [...] has become

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but "the effective or practical name for the theological-political myth we call sovereignty"' (Naas, 2008: 109).

In the concepts developed by Jeffers in the long years of the Second World War, we could say that what America needs to do is to rediscover its tragic mission, or, perhaps more accurately, to conceive of its mission as a disclosure of the tragic which in the contemporary world has been replaced by the 'pitiful'. In another of his suppressed poems, Robinson Jeffers maintains that the sense of the tragic consists in being able to recognize the ruination of our plans not only as an effect of the processes of human history (like a lost war, for instance) but as an intervention of a force that collapses all human planning and translates human actions from the orderly to the chaotic and fortuitous. The tragic necessarily exposes man to Fate and therefore to the incumbent repulse of ambitions and unavoidable defeat. Hence, the politics of tragedy is an anti-politics: it aims and feeds off failure not success, and its war cry is not 'glory to the victorious' but 'glory to the vanquished', *Vae Victis* or *Weh den Geistigen*. This is how Jeffers speaks about it in his 1943 poem 'Tragedy Has Obligations': 'This is the essence of tragedy, / To have meant well and made woe, and watch Fate, / All stone, approach' (Jeffers, 1977: 158). The only success worthy of its name is then a particular manner of being linked with the world. 'Obligations' that form the heart of the tragic describe a special binding or, rather, bonding of man and the world, a connection in which man is not a superior power but recedes towards the background so that domination is replaced by togetherness that implies not only a belonging but also caring. We need to unseal the sense of the tragic so as to be bound together with the world again but also to feel obliged (in the meaning of solicitude and gratefulness) and obligated (that is bound to feel responsibility) to it.

The logic of obligation undermines everything that has been constructed and supported by the machinery of the state and the political. Obligation is an earthquake that destabilizes such systems, ends them, without however terminating them; i.e., it 'ends' in the sense of radical interrogation after which nothing is the same, whereas it is precisely the 'same' that the state and its machinery want to proliferate and defend at all

costs. But it also 'ends' in yet another important way: it brings the human with all the luggage of culture, which over centuries was giving in to the machinery and the mechanical, to the very edge where it has to face what defies and obliterates its schemes and structures. The world as we know it disappears not because we have been forgetful about it but just the opposite—because we have discovered our obligations to it. In one of his late texts, Derrida writes:

> As soon as I am obliged, from the instant when I am obliged to *you*, owe it *to myself* to carry *you,* as soon as I speak to you and am responsible for you, or before you, there can no longer, essentially, be any world. There is no longer any world to support us, to serve as mediation, ground, earth, foundation, or alibi. Perhaps there is no longer anything but the abyssal altitude of the sky. I am alone in the world there where there is no longer any world. (Derrida, 2005: 158)

This kind of 'ending' certainly bespeaks the end of a certain predetermined identity, always founded upon the stability of tradition, heritage, and law, that guards them against incursions of others, of 'barbarians', who are considered to be a deadly threat to the order of the world. The ending in question, the ending of a life that is predictable in its universalizing repetitiveness and summarizes its public aspect in such symbols meant to dogmatically unite all who believe in this particular line of life as, for instance, the flag, is the end of the continent. What happens in such a liminal space, littoral range of continent's end, is a sudden estrangement of culture from itself, an opening in which a culture begins to seriously interrogate its own identity and priorities. This is a moment when members of a given culture begin to have doubts when it comes to describing themselves as a 'we' that is not only different from others but also marked with an indelible stigma of superiority. 'We', the 'we' that sounds so grand and powerful in the pronouncements and professions of the political world, the 'we' that sees itself embedded in the common history, now experiences a bereavement: its history, established history dictating to the 'we' its line of life, is effaced, and its script so well-wrought in the memory of the nation becomes obliterated. The history as a process of changes and events is still there, but it has lost its readability,

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rubbed it off, and become a cryptic code that cannot be gathered in any central myth. This is what happens in Jasper Johns's famous 1955 painting *The White Flag*, in which the contours of the American symbol are blurred, colors are removed, and exact stories of patriotic feats implied by the rich iconography associated with the flag have been replaced by the illegible excerpts from newspapers and magazines. In a stronger version of the same process, a culture undergoes what we may describe as the Gulliver effect: not only is a given culture diminished, but it is emptied of its glorious content, if not openly ridiculed. Robinson Jeffers makes such a Swiftian maneuver in one his suppressed poems: 'It is quite natural the two-footed beast / That inflicts terror, the cage, enslavement, torment and death on all other animals / Should eat the dough that he mixes and drink the death-cup' (Jeffers, 1977: 136).

To be itself, a culture must 'lose' itself, must see itself as an unfulfilled project, as a promise that has to remain open and vacant and therefore cannot defend itself because, in fact, there is nothing to defend. America thought of this way would then remain a messianic blueprint, the city upon a hill that John Winthrop sermonized about in the middle of the Atlantic in 1630. But the point of such projects is that, if they want to maintain their energy, they must remain a promise, a vision, a prophecy, a poetic design and effort. The ominous fate of America was that at one point it started to believe that the vision has come true, that the city has been built upon a hill for everyone to follow; then followers had to become qualified, approved of, in order to be admitted inside, and those rejected were considered barbarians besieging the town. In 1944, Robinson Jeffers prophetically wrote about it in the following way: 'We have enjoyed fine dreams; we have dreamed of unifying the world; we are unifying it—against us' (Jeffers, 1977: 132). In the same poem, he outlines the evolution of America, which from the city upon a hill has become 'Fortress America' which 'may yet for a long time stand, between the east and the west, like Byzantium' (Jeffers, 1977: 132).

If America, or any other state for that matter, wants to redeem itself, it must disown, disinherit itself without rejecting its own heritage. As Jacques Derrida puts it:

> What is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say 'me' or 'we'; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference with itself. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference with itself. (Derrida, 1992: 9)

D.H. Lawrence sounds this warning in yet another way: Americans are, in fact, 'Americans' only to the degree to which they 1) realize that they are not original dwellers and thus have been already received in the land they claim theirs by somebody else who preceded them there, and 2) they are 'Americans' only when they refrain from being 'one hundred-per-cent Americans'. The Americans will turn out worthy of this name only on condition they recognize the fact that their line of life has been preceded by other lines and thus is founded upon something older and more savage than 'America'. Here is D.H. Lawrence again: 'It is your test, Americans. / Can you leave the remnants of the old race on their ground, / To live their own life, fulfil their own ends in their own way?' (Lawrence, 1972: 779).

The very choice of the word 'test' is meaningful with its inherent skeptical questioning of America as *fait accompli*, an already fulfilled project outlined and accomplished by the 'hundred-per-cent Americans'. If we speak of a 'test', we move into the domain of conditionality, of a reality that is to come, a certain, or rather uncertain, futurity which opens in front of us. Nothing could be further from what Theodore Roosevelt professed in 1894 as the doctrine of 'true Americanism', which eulogizes those 'who have thought and worked, and conquered, and lived, and died, purely as Americans' (Roosevelt, 1926: 207–15). One can easily point out that Roosevelt's 'America' is a jealous and despotic monster founded upon the reenactment of the originary sacrifice: not only has one to become 'purely American' ('We must Americanize them [newcomers] in every way' [Roosevelt, 1926: 201]), but one must apostatize from one's own traditions (supposedly those being not 'one hundred-per-cent' traditions)

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to assume, more than just passively 'assume'—to wholeheartedly, unreservedly, unskeptically, uncritically welcome what is 'America'. Those coming over to America are not entering a domain of debate and interrogation, but just the opposite—they step upon the land that has already resolved the question of its identity and future. Roosevelt decisively and authoritatively claims that, unlike other countries such as those 'stretching from the Rio Grande to Cape Horn', America has resolved the problem of its national identity (Roosevelt, 1926: 209). As he says, 'politically this question of American nationality has been settled once and for all' (Roosevelt, 1926: 209). Hence, it is only natural that the lot of newcomers, according to Roosevelt, depends upon whether or not 'they throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be European, and become Americans like the rest of us' (Roosevelt, 1926: 213). 'America' is then a place of the most general but, at the same time, most superficial metanoia; a territory where a tergiversation of one's loyalties takes place, where one relinquishes once and for all one's previous line of life. But, as we have just said, this apostasy is both radical and guarded by serious sanctions ('whoever does not so believe has no business to bear the name at all, and if he comes from Europe, the sooner he goes back there the better' [Roosevelt, 1926: 213) and superficial; it is based on the total atrophy and blindness to the question of 'what is', for which Jan Patočka excavated a term from Plato: the care of the soul.

You become an American by the exclusion and erasure of the traces of everything that is not 'America', and it is difficult not to notice that Roosevelt accentuates that this retraction and cultural apostasy ought to take place at the very moment you enter America. It's the 'shores' which constitute natural *cordonne sanitaire* sorting out Americans from those who are not worthy of the name. The fortress America now obtains its variable; a harbor America, a port of call one where strict procedures hold. 'Newcomers to our shores' (Roosevelt's phrase) are received hospitably only on condition of relinquishing who they have been so far: 'We must Americanize them in every way, in speech, in political ideas and principles, and in their way of looking at the relations between Church and State' (Roosevelt, 1926:

211). Only then can they truly enter the interior of the continent. America is an accomplished project, those who call themselves 'Americans' must be such exclusively 'one hundred-per-cent', because, as Roosevelt maintains categorically, 'We welcome the German or the Irishman who becomes an American. We have no use for the German or Irishman who remains such' (Roosevelt, 1926: 211). Thus, if you come to America, you have to do this; in fact, you CAN do it only already as an American, an individual who comes to American shores and is allowed inside America is an American part of a German, Irish, Polish subject. The shore, the edge of the continent, is not a place of welcome but of an ordeal, a sacrifice, an expropriation. America can be a gain but only on condition of a tremendous loss. The human is overcome by being subjected to the rules that pertain to the domain of the 'American'. The most characteristic feature of this realm is that within it a man/woman must sever his/her relationship with other sectors of the world, so that in fact the 'world' gets narrowed down and limited to one and only sphere called 'America'. As Roosevelt pontificates, 'We have no room for any people who do not act and vote simply as Americans' (Roosevelt, 1926: 212). It is remarkable how the general line of life ('act') becomes one with a certain political choice; acting and voting are one because, having reached the American shore, you not only have relinquished your old line of life but also immediately endorsed the whole new system. If you refrain from doing this, you become 'nothing at all' (Roosevelt, 1926: 214). 'America' is then a positively defined, accomplished 'something' outside which you position yourself either as a hopelessly belated member of the 'Old World' or just plain 'nothing'. As Roosevelt constantly reiterates, 'Above all, the immigrant must learn to talk and think and *be* United States' (Roosevelt, 1926: 215). Hence, he continues, Americans are those 'who have nevertheless thought and worked, and conquered, and lived, and died, purely as Americans' (Roosevelt, 1926: 211).

Let us rehearse the sentence again: Americans are those 'who have nevertheless thought and worked, and conquered, and lived, and died, purely as Americans'. It announces that Americans will connect themselves with the world in a way different from the traditions of the Old World. The human individual

is linked with reality through the agency of the apparatus called the United States. He/she will work and think and dictate his/her will to the other ('conquer') as the 'American'; what is more, even life itself is not just that of a man but of the 'American'. Thus, man's life is never 'naked' because it is always, already at the threshold of America, at the shores of America, be they Ellis Island or Kennedy Airport, 'dressed' in the gear of the American line of life. The Biblical reference is never far away: at the shores of America, at the edges of the continent, man and woman, the newcomers to the New World, must lose their nakedness, and acquire a new shining dress, thinking with shame of their previous nudity. What happens at the shore of America is a reiteration, a reenactment of the transfiguration scene described by Mark in the ninth chapter of his Gospel. Christ is transfigured in front of the three apostles, three witnesses, three officials of the world, and 'his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them'. Peter's response to Christ 'it is good to be here' is precisely what Roosevelt wants to generate first from the officials receiving the newcomers ('We freely extend the hand of welcome and of good-fellowship to every man' [Roosevelt, 1926: 214]) and then from immigrants themselves ('to bear then name of American is to bear the most honourable of titles' [Roosevelt, 1926: 213]).

Herbert George Wells produces an ironic version of such a transfiguration in his book of reflections on America, titled adequately *The Future in America*. Having commented upon the tension between the spirit of relentless 'commercial competition' that effectuates 'certain emptiness in the resulting wealthy' and the 'dim, large movement of thought towards a change of national method', Wells insistently emphasizes the loss of the native garment, the original 'nakedness' of clothes which somewhat were extensions of the skin (Wells, 1907: 145). Upon arriving on American shores, the 'incomer drops into American clothes, and then he does not catch the careless eye' (Wells, 1907: 149). The immigrant, 'very respectful, very polite', has traded 'some picturesque east-European garb' for 'cheap American clothes, resorted to what naturalists call 'protective mimicry', even perhaps acquired a collar' (Wells, 1907: 149).

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The heavy-handed and ominous ambiguity of the very word 'collar' testifies that Wells is referring not only to the sartorial realm but is also making a sociopolitical comment.

One could argue that America never paid much attention to Plato's indictment that what constitutes human being is the care of the soul, the denial of which was a natural consequence of the conviction that 'American' always dominates man. We have seen that 'America' offers life but only on the condition that you relinquish yourself. You enter 'America' not as yourself but already as an 'American'. Thus you become a citizen having previously lost your personal past. Rodolphe Gasché maintains that man and the human soul are synonyms, and it is due to this synonymity that we can know 'about the whole of the world and of life' and consequently that 'the soul, if cared for, is capable of beholding the world in its totality' (Gasché, 2009: 234). If this is the case, then America's accent upon 'Americanism', upon living and dying 'purely as Americans', contests these suppositions. The care for the soul has been replaced by the care for the American, which is, as we already know, 'the most honourable of titles'. If life is conditioned by and depends upon the care for the soul, then all reservations concerning this, all denials and deprecations of this truth, must mean, if not a weakening of life itself, then at least its considerable distortion. Life is now defined not according to the logic of the care for the soul but according to the demands of the laws that determine, protect, and promote the American line of life. Roosevelt speaks about excommunicating anarchy and languages other than English ('We believe that English, and no other language, is that in which all the school exercises should be conducted' [Roosevelt, 1926: 212]) and prohibitions (a ban on anarchy as 'incompatible' with American life [Roosevelt, 1926: 214]). Today America develops biometric means of control and has grown into a gigantic, impersonal machine that wants to know literally everything about everybody. The care of the soul has been supplanted by the care for the data.

Giorgio Agamben speaks about 'the fleeting and almost insolent pleasure of being recognized by a machine without the burden of emotional implications that are inseparable from recognition by another human being', which seems to be a contemporary

equivalent of the joy that Roosevelt expresses over newcomers to the American shores who decide to relinquish their own culture, language, and person (Agamben, 2011: 53). D.H. Lawrence's analysis of Americans emphasizes two crucial elements. First, it attacks and tries to undo the principle of the obligatory transfiguration on behalf of the peculiarity of the exceptional which has veered off the main line of life. Talking about the American Indian, Lawrence maintains that, 'He is a savage with his own peculiar consciousness, his own peculiar customs and observations' (Lawrence, 1972: 776). To save its futurity from a mere, neutral, and empty 'future', America needs to respect the 'peculiar', i.e., it has to demonstrate restraint in its mission as the city upon a hill. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Lawrence's analysis urges America to wield its tremendous power with care and lenity. The futurity of America depends upon the degree to which it shows moderation in using its power, as the true manifestation of power consists in its mitigation. If America has a mission to accomplish, its gist is a powerful mitigation of power. Here is Lawrence again: 'Because he is so *absolutely* in your power, that, / before God, you must be careful' (Lawrence, 1972: 776). The mission of America is to hold back *vis-à-vis* the presence of the savage, and, let us say it openly, America has failed in this mission. As Michel Serres suggests, 'The hominid must learn to hold back, must learn modesty and shame; and his language must learn understatement; his science, reserve' (Serres, 1997: 117). This evolves into a kind of ethics of restraint and holding back, which is an ethics of new gentleness:

> The gentle man holds back. He reserves some strength to retain his strength, refuses in himself and around him the brute power that is propagated. The sage thus disobeys the single law of expansion, does not always persevere in his being and thinks that elevating his own conduct to a universal law is the definition of evil as much as madness. (Serres, 1997: 119)

With this ethics of new gentleness that wants to care for the savage and that is founded upon the principle of holding back, of the un-powered power, we are returning to the logic of the conditional we have spoken about before. The 'if' structure announces a new kind of politics that wants to think democracy

and sovereignty less in terms of power and more as a certain suspension of power. This is the opposite of what, according to Roosevelt, was taking place on the shores of America: what is to be relinquished now is not the particular which gives in to the force of the one general line of life, but just the opposite—it is the apparatus that has construed and monitored this line of life that has to be suspended. Thus, if Roosevelt posits as one of the fundamental conditions of being an American a denial of 'anarchy', it is precisely a 'beautiful anarchist' whom is welcomed by e. e. cummings (cummings, 1991: 677). In his 1958 collection, he envisages the hope of and for America in a way that anticipates by at least a quarter of a century Peter Sloterdijk's practice of the cynical reason. Hence on the one hand we have Roosevelt's true Americanism caricatured by cummings as 'great pink / superme / diocr i/ ty of / a hyperhypocritical D / mocrac (sing / down with the fascist beast /boom / boom)' (cummings, 1991: 635); on the other, there stands, or rather incessantly changes, his position in a peculiar and scandalous movement of 'swimfloatdrifting', someone whose position and character is impossible to name unequivocally, a 'trickstervillain / raucous rogue & / vivid Voltaire / you beautiful anarchist / (i salute thee' (cummings, 1991: 677).

One should never let go unnoticed cummings's spelling and typographical arrangements, which allow him to unobservedly shuttle from the level of the individual to the level of the public. Having launched his vitriolic attack on American democracy, as a kind of populist 'democrac(sing down)', he locates its sources in the egotistic turn that has dominated the life of the human individual. The mediocrity of the mass society is a 'superMEdiocrity'; that is, the public is being shaped by the excessive desires and ambitions of the ego. The 'subhuman superstate' (of which we have read in another poem) takes its beginnings in the petrifications and ossifications of the superME. Subhuman super-state serving the interests of super-me would be cummings's formula for 'America' with its system construed of everything which 'dull all regular righteous comfortable', a bitter caricature of Roosevelt's 'true Americanism' (1991: 677).

Now the shores of America begin to mean something else. The general line of life called 'true Americanism' ceases to suppress the particular on behalf of one history and one list of virtues. This systematically arranged world called 'America' now is looked upon as if from the edge of yet another continent. America has reached another shore and now its major constitutive elements such as state, patriotism, law, freedom are placed in quotations marks. Hence cummings writes 'quote citizens unquote', 'quote state unquote', and the quotation marks perform a double function: they introduce a distance between ourselves and the notions they surround, the distance which is a space where the 'thief crook cynic' mind of the 'trickstervillain' works and where the concepts subjected to his operations are getting seriously scrutinized and critically worked upon, not merely accepted, as Roosevelt demanded in his creed of true Americanism. When Roosevelt requires, without reservations and provisos, a total apostasis from one's previous identity and acceptance of the new one which is very precisely defined and measured, what happens at these other shores that America has reached, the shores of late- or post-modernity, is the dilution of such identity. For cummings the process of withdrawal of the rigorously determined code of identification implies two movements. First is the recognition and bringing to the center of attention life itself, existence which does not privilege the human, neither does it respect human measures of time or rational explanations of what life is. In fine, what must emerge is life before it was provided with qualifications produced by the human discourse. Thus, we have to become aware of history not as a mere sequence of events shaping the horizon of human existence, but we have to experience 'the gay / great happening illimitably earth' (cummings, 1991: 663). The second movement takes its energy from this illimitably happening earth where the 'illimitably' marks reservations concerning the possibilities of finding expressions for this kind of 'happening' in the human discourse and thinking. cummings's neologism 'illimitably' suggests that we must both try to undertake the effort of naming phenomena of the happening earth and recognize a failure of such an undertaking. As cummings says in another text, this is 'the glow / of a joy which wasn't

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and isn't and won't be words' (cummings, 1991: 631). This leads to, as we have already seen, a necessary confusion of grammar and its categories and, ultimately, to the undermining of the very foundations of the human subjecthood. It is important to note this mutual entanglement of the human subject and language: cummings's radicalism in disfiguring and distorting the English grammar certainly is the manner in which his American subject voices his or her uneasiness *vis-à-vis* the illimitably happening earth. If we remember Roosevelt's insistence upon English (supposedly grammatically correct English) as the only linguistic means that ought to be present in American society and education, we will plainly see the difference between the events happening on the American shores. Roosevelt's empowered state becomes the state in quotation marks, and the subjecthood upon whose strictly American contours Roosevelt is so insistent now melts, thus also raising doubts as to the character of American democracy. Let us look at an interesting sequence from e. e. cummings's *Xaipe* collection: 'are flowers neither why nor how / when is now and which is Who / and i am you are i am we / (pretty twinkle merry bells) / Someone has been born / everyone is noone' (cummings, 1991: 630). The human subject loses its strongly separate human identity: born as 'someone', he/she enters the life of 'flowers', the effect strengthened by the first line of the poem, which reads 'blossoming are people' (cummings, 1991: 630). At the same time, we obtain here a critique of the democratic order of *hoi polloi*, as the 'everyone' of the constructed political order becomes 'no one', and the social organization empties itself out to be no more than a network of anonymous, disposable numerical units.

'America' approaches then a condition which Bataille maps out for the future society, a condition certainly utopian, the force of which consists in dislocating the society from the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic pattern that has ultimately dominated its structures. Norman O. Brown in the early 1990s turned towards Bataille to revive the spirit of American politics as 'that utopian promise to replace the 'government of men' with the 'government of things' (Brown, 1991: 192). This has nothing to do with narrowly understood environmental concerns

or the ideology of returning to Nature ('It cannot be the obsolete Nature worship that conservationism is vainly trying to resuscitate' (Brown, 1991: 197); it has all to do with a construction of the society which is profoundly related to life, of which it is an expression. The society as life embodied whose aim can be achieved only when the human subject holds back his rights as the unique and exceptional entity, precisely becoming 'a' subject rather than 'the' subject. Such a move would be tantamount to erasing the quotation marks surrounding and conventionalizing such notions, as cummings has demonstrated, as 'state'. What is at stake is whether or not we can 'grasp the full reality of an embodied life of polymorphous bodily communications, to contradict the spectral world of entertainment, and narcissistic dreams of pleasure without pain' (Brown, 1991: 193). We can look at Lawrence's test for America and cummings's postulates of undoing life, which is, in fact, mere 'undying' as an attempt at construing one body, a Spinozistic life in which 'there is no privileging of the human form or the human species as microcosm' (Brown, 1991: 135). In such polymorphous life there is nothing that could be 'one hundred-per-cent'. Hence, when Lawrence sets his test for Americans in which he wants them, the most civilized and technologically advanced people, to understand the 'savage' and then to admit that they are only guests in a country which is not their 'own' at all, he in fact asks them whether or not they are able to accept life rather than 'undying'. This in turn undermines major principles of the socioeconomic-political order. Such embodied life, as Brown says, 'is not hierarchically organized by functional subordination of past to a principal part, the representative part, the "head" of the body. Consequently, his [Spinoza's] political theory of collective participation in one body has nothing to do with medieval (or Hobbesian) notions of unification through sovereign representative; or with *corpus Christi*, in which Christ is the head of the Church' (Brown, 1991: 133). From this perspective, America presents its shores as the place where Hobbes gives way to Spinoza. What used to pave the way for us to become members of a gigantic machinery of the state and its agencies now withdraws before the power of human individuals communicating among themselves and bracketing

productions of official ideologies, where the national colors fade till we all gather under the white flag. America welcomes not by binding newcomers to the unconditional loyalty to the flag ('He must revere only our flag; not only must it come first, but no other flag should even come second' [Roosevelt, 1926: 215]) but by opening our eyes so that we see all national loyalties take their beginning in the life embodied, in the life of (as Velvet Underground used to sing) 'white light, white heat'. Jasper Johns's white flag does not try to communicate anything else. This is how Norman O. Brown summarizes this Spinozistic transformation taking place on the edge of the continent: 'it can be seen as setting the historical agenda for us today: to rectify the flaw in modernity; to arrive at one world; to reorganize the gigantic material process of intercommunication released by modernity into a coherent unity; call it Love's Body' (Brown, 1991: 128).

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TRACES IN THE OCEAN.
On Melville, Wolanowski, and Willing Suspension of Disbelief

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Ed Murrow—who has recently become the central character of George Clooney's picture Good Night and Good Luck, *and who, during the war, spent quite some time treated in hospital along with a group of wounded Poles and spoke our language pretty well—would tease me when the* Przekrój *weekly began to publish my cycle 'Now you can tell the whole story'*[1] *and other reportages, saying: 'Lucjan, reading what you write, I am beginning to understand how* you *would write, if you yourself believed in* what *you write'. He would often lend me American writing coursebooks and reportage collections.*

Lucjan Wolanowski, *Nie wszyscy byli aniołami. (Dziennik dziennikarza)* *[Not Everyone Was an Angel. (A Journalist's Journal)]*

FAIRY-TALE/REALITY. A PREFACE[2]

I am reading Wolanowski as a 45-year-old, in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century—and I swallow the 290 pages of his

1. *Przekrój* [*the Cross-Section*], published since 1945 until 2013, was one of the most highly esteemed opinion-forming Polish weeklies, promoting western culture and values and featuring texts by leading Polish journalists, creative writers and satirists. 'Now you can tell the whole story' is my proposition of a translation of the original title of Lucjan Wolanowski's cycle or reportages 'Teraz to już można opowiedzieć'.
2. The argument of this article is based on my chapter in a Polish monograph dedicated to Lucjan Wolanowski: Paweł Jędrzejko (2009) 'Ślady na Oceanie. Refleksja nad myśleniem magicznym i prozą Lucjana Wolanowskiego', in *Wokół reportażu podróżniczego. Tom 3. Lucjan Wolanowski (1920–2006). Studia–Szkice–Materiały*. Dariusz Rott and Mariusz Kubik (eds). Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 94–106.

book on the *Rebels of the South Seas*[3] in one night. Just like thirty-odd years before, when—as a chronically ill, bed-ridden child from the then smoggy, industrial, province of Silesia—I would devour every book that a kind parental hand would leave at my night table (then, out of sheer boredom), especially, if such a book could teleport me to places distant in time and space. So distant that they would seem unreal; so unreal that they would almost seem a fairy-tale, born of someone's poetic imagination. Quite honestly, in the 1970s and 80s it would not make an iota of difference to me if I went to sea on board of the *Adventure* with Moomin-pappa, or whether I sailed around the world with Joshua Slocum as a deckhand of the *Spray*. At the time, the facticity of distant realities was just as unverifiable for me as it was for the adults of my family. Only I had not yet developed the necessary awareness to understand how important this difference was for them.

SAILING/IMAGINATION. INTRODUCTION

When the *Rebels of the South Seas* came out in 1981, one of the very few legal windows onto the world in the then communist Poland was sailing. All one needed to do to be allowed to go to sea on board of a sailing yacht—one usually owned by a yacht club sponsored by a major state-owned industrial company or by a state-run institution—may be summarized in a few uncomplicated steps. First, one needed to undergo training, pass an examination and obtain a proper sailing license. Then, one had to file an application with the local branch of the Polish Yachting Association to have the so-called 'Yachtsman's Log Book' issued. Henceforth, things were simple: one had to make an appointment to undergo a few medical tests, have the doctor's approval stamped into the newly obtained Log Book, pay a visit to the local passport office, fill in about a ton of official documents, and finally—allowing a few weeks necessary for the Authorities to x-ray the applicant for traces of political dissidence—spend an exciting night while waiting in line to receive the much longed-for 'Sea-Sailing Permit' from a 'botox-faced' automaton of an officer. The shiny red rubber stamp in the Log Book

3. (Wolanowski, 1980 [1981]). Throughout the article, I refer to the book by its English title in my translation: *Rebels of the South Seas. A Reporter on Track of the Mutiny on Board of His Majesty's Ship the* Bounty.

was *almost* a passport, just like sailing itself was *almost* traveling. *Almost*, because the 'Permit' did not grant one the right to leave international waters or enter the territorial belt of any country other than Poland. All it legitimized was a far-off glance at the fascinating Western world, a distant perspective, which, after all, is an archaic term for a spy-glass. Indeed, at the time, we were allowed so much as an 'optical *de*lusion': we could sail as close to the islands of Bornholm or Christiansø as the regulations permitted and spy through the glass of the binoculars upon the other, forbidden, reality of the 'bloodthirsty capitalist world'. Voyeurism, along with the fantasies it energized, would, out of necessity, have to suffice in lieu of a full-fledged experience. Still, returning from such cruises, Polish yachtsmen would often spin yarns, bragging, for instance, to have 'been to Denmark'—yet, although they would never have set foot on the Danish soil, just because they managed to 'sneak' a nautical mile or so into the belt of Danish national waters, in their minds their 'almost-a-visit' would be nothing short of real. As real, as they only could imagine it. After all, nominally, they *were* in Denmark.

Incidentally, it was also in that time that the log books of the majority of Polish sailing yachts would record a skyrocketing increase in the instances of serious damage to hulls, rigging, or vital systems: 'unexpectedly', fresh water pipes would 'crack', steerage cables would 'suddenly' break, and the leaky planking would let in such amounts of seawater that, despite their dedication, the crew working the bilge pumps (which, more often than not, would 'prove defective' anyway) and buckets—would not be able to avert the imminent danger. 'Now you can tell the whole story': many of the more courageous skippers (who would either have struck friendships or deals with crewmen, whose day job would incidentally involve serving as officers of the Home Security Service of the People's Republic of Poland but who, like everyone else, would *also* harbor secret desires to experience the world outside the Eastern Block) would, more or less openly, and sometimes only on paper, sabotage the boats in order to meet the legal requirements for a 'justifiable deviation' as defined by international laws concerning Marine Occurrence Obligations and the master's responsibilities in event of emergencies. The 'justifiable deviation' laws would

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allow skippers to put into port with a damaged ship. The fact that the closest port of escape would always be a non-Polish port would, of course, be a 'complete coincidence'.

Then, usually, the sailors would return home—and when the short sailing season in the Baltic Sea was over, those enchanted by the sea would seek an ersatz to nautical voyaging: they would lose themselves in Conrad, Melville, popular travelogues, diaries, journals and reportages, often published in the then popular series titled *Famous Sailors*.[4] The sailing community would also gather together around the first sea-shanty festivals and concerts, mesmerized by the simplicity of the then fresh translations of traditional working songs introduced to Polish culture by such major figures as Marek Szurawski and his group 'The Old Bells', Jerzy Rogacki and his band 'The Four Reefs' or Andrzej Mendygrał and his favorite a cappella ensemble, 'The Roaring Twenties'.[5] Between concerts, in a joyful mood, in any space that—with a wee bit of imagination— could pass for a port tavern, surrounded by trusted shipmates', friends, with whom one would share the secret of the last 'justified deviation', one would make plans for the next cruise: the next expedition into the liquid space of unlimited freedom, of liberty without borders. The sea and the whole maritime tradition—which the Poles have first adapted from maritime nations of the British Isles, Ireland, Brittany, or the USA, and then developed their own, original, formulas[6]—would bring people together. Thus emerged a phenomenon

4. A series published by Wydawnictwo Morskie in Gdańsk; the original title of the series is *Sławni* żeglarze *[Famous Sailors]*. For the complete list of titles, see, for instance: <http://www.biblionetka.pl/bookSerie.aspx?id=177>.

5. The English names of the bands are those in official use; the Polish names, respectively, are: Stare Dzwony, Cztery Refy and Ryczące Dwudziestki. All of them still exist and are active in the Polish and international scene of maritime folk music.

6. To some extent, this kind of 'magical thinking' manifests its power until this day. After 1989, yachting became one of the favorite Polish sports and the popularity of sea songs reached such heights that the proliferation of sea shanty groups and events dedicated to maritime music gave rise to a unique branch of music industry in Poland. Next to traditional songs—whose musical arrangements are often simplistic, and whose lyrics are often sexist and anti-ecological, sometimes brutal, sometimes bawdy or crude, yet whose popularity never abates among

unique in the scale of the world: a heterogeneous subculture bound with the ties of solidarity—a close-knit community of yachtsmen and sea shanty lovers, that, by imparting upon each of its members a modicum of the sense of liberty, would empower everyone—came into existence right under the noses of the Home Security Service of the People's Republic of Poland. Anchoring the complicated, tangled everyday reality in a distant history—in the days when 'ships were made of wood and men were made of steel'—members of this group, like the mutineers of old, would seek refuge from the 'injustice of laws and the cruelty of the authority' in the endlessness of the inhuman ocean and in the fascinating unfamiliarity of the distant lands: the sailing season over, travel writing, sea romances, adventure novels and sea shanties had to suffice as a necessary antidote to the harsh, hopeless reality of the time. No wonder then, that in contrast to the penetrating greyness of the Poland of the 1980s, the lush vegetation, the mild climate of the South Seas and the warm composition of the happy islanders—mythologized in songs of many nations—became central tropes of the stereotypical Polish rhetoric of an earthly paradise. Hence, sailing,

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the aficionados of maritime culture—contemporary songs of the sea constantly come into existence: new forecastle songs, rock-shanties, pop-shanties and neo-shanties are often performed with the accompaniment of instruments or a cappella. The latter ones usually retain the essential poetics of the traditional maritime work song, but are performed in professionally arranged close harmonies—and even though the genetic continuity is unquestionable, the neo-shanties, written for stage and recorded in professional studios, are a genre of entertainment and not a working tool. Groups such as Banana Boat, Pearls and Rascals, Formacja, or EKT Gdynia continually supplement their 'traditional' repertoire with new songs; every year new maritime folk groups are formed and new events dedicated to maritime music are held: in 2009 alone, over 30 cyclical sea shanty festivals would be organized throughout Poland, gathering jointly several hundred thousand lovers of maritime folk. Until the online community life shifted to Facebook, the statistics of the largest Polish portals of maritime music—*Szantymaniak* and *Szanty 24*—would record several thousand unique and returning visitors a month. The phenomenon of the Polish sea shanty, however, continues to develop, albeit its ideological significance has changed: today, to a much greater extent, maritime culture provides a psychological 'safety valve' for the generic overworked corporate employee, whose idea of freedom is no longer related to national liberation.

maritime culture and the literature of the sea proved to resonate in unison with the Polish romantic tradition of national liberation. For years, the figure of the nautical voyage and the limitlessness of the open ocean would kindle hope: sea literature would give Poles the strength to take heart in the face of daily adversities, sailing trips would whet the curiosity of the world, the communal listening to sea shanties would strengthen social bonds of those defiant with respect to the stifling system—and thereby, by bringing the popular awareness of oppression to a much sharper focus—all of these factors together would help forment mutinous sentiments in the no longer 'captive minds'. This is the time when Lucjan Wolanowski's extraordinary reportage made it to the Polish bookstores—and this is when the Poles believed its truth without reservations.

Today, the excitement of sailing no longer depends on instances of 'justified deviation'. Anyone, money and health permitting, can circumnavigate the globe: a rebellion—if it ever happens—tends to take the form of 'an intimate revolt'.[7] The Poles sail more often, much further and far better than ever before, albeit the philosophy underlying their nautical adventures has, comprehensibly, evolved. Myself, at those rare instances when time permits me to go to sea, I am no longer drawn to sailing by the magnetic virtue of the more or less imaginary Other worlds: it is the mesmerizing power of the ocean that attracts me. I go sailing to reduce the number and intensity of stimuli that my mind is forced to process every day, to experience the 'natural stepper', the rocking and rolling boat, tossed by the seething swell with no land in sight. Sailing, I face 'organic', immediate, reality—I regain peace of mind and can hear my own thoughts. I go to sea to clearly see the crevices of the discourse: to map places, where the somatic and the semiotic blend together. And I read Wolanowski as if time never passed.

THE MAGICAL/THE REAL. JOURNEYING

In the past (not so distant at all), in a world in which places reachable today within a few hours were so achingly unattainable that they would—in essence be unreal—the threshold separating the fact and the fiction was drawn by one's capacity of willing suspension of disbelief. Key words activating the process are often tantamount

7. A term borrowed from Julia Kristeva's eponymous book.

to the names of particular genres of writing: terms such as 'travelogue', 'diary', 'memoir', 'journal', or 'reportage', as well as 'history' open up the space of trust. Representing the so-called 'literature of fact', the thus labelled works of non-fiction function in the realm of readerly reception as media of historical truth. Yet, it is not only in the context of societies exposed to the consequences of prolonged isolation that the thought Friedrich Nietzsche formulated in his *Daybreak* proves applicable:

> *Facta! Yes, Facta ficta!*—A historian has to do, not with what actually happened, but only with events supposed to have happened: for only the latter have *produced an effect*. Likewise only with supposed heroes. His theme, so-called world history, is opinions about supposed actions and their supposed motives, which in turn give rise to further opinions and actions, the reality of which is however at once vaporised again and produces an *effect* only as vapour—a continual generation and pregnancy of phantoms over the impenetrable mist of unfathomable reality. All historians speak of things which have never existed except in imagination. (Nietzsche, 2005: 156)

The discourse of history—always 'perspectivist', always political—like all other narratives lends itself to deconstructions. It is so, because—on the one hand—is does have the power of calling into existence 'facts' whose 'facticity' is usually an exponent of the credibility of a given interpretation of objects making up material reality, or of source texts. On the other—it is capable of rendering 'facts' null and void: it may marginalize, or eliminate them altogether. The first of the two processes finds an excellent illustration in a contemporary debate on the Battle at the Dog Field, described by Vincentius of Cracow in his *Chronica Polonorum*,[8] which allegedly took place in the fall of 1109 between the forces of the Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich V and the army of the Polish ruler, Boleslaus III the Wry-Mouthed. It is common knowledge that today a major group of historians—revising historiographic canons

8. *Chronica seu originale regum et principum Poloniae*, or *Chronica Polonorum*, is a Latin history of Poland written between 1190 and 1208 by Wincenty Kadłubek (1161–1223), a thirteenth-century Bishop of Cracow and historian of Poland, also known as Vincentius de Cracovia, Vincent Kadlubek, Vincent Kadlubo, Vincent Kadlubko, Vincent of Kraków, or Master Vincentius.

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that had dominated the teaching of history in the decades preceding the 1989 political transformations of Poland—present arguments undermining the 'facticity' of the alleged military engagement. Myself, however, I have experienced its 'truth' in a manner that leaves no doubt as to its 'reality'. In front of my whole elementary school class, I was failed by the teacher for the lack of knowledge of the date of the fateful battle—and I had to swallow a very real, burning shame of public humiliation: a fact, that even the make-up grade, which saved my GPA at the time, could not erase.

More importantly, however, it seems that even though the reality of the battle referred to above avoids verification, since the skirmish (even if it happened) is historically too remote to allow for any unambiguous confirmation or disproof of its facticity, its presence in the discourse of history has continued to have most tangible consequences. The battle *has happened*, even if it has not: the school transcript featuring my feral failing grade proves it beyond doubt. Interestingly, the reverse mechanism works in an analogous fashion: historiography proves perfectly capable of eliminating inconvenient 'facts' by removing them from history. Suffice it to remind the reader how many Poles painfully felt the consequences of overt speaking about the massacre of Polish officers executed by People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), the Soviet secret police, in the village of Katyń in April and May 1940, when the official historiography of the People's Republic of Poland recorded no such event. In the context of the above, a question that translates the heretofore reflections on 'facts' and 'non-facts' into the sphere of ethics becomes central: if Poland had not undergone political transformations in 1989 and if the next ten generations of Poles were educated on the basis of the 'factography' underlying official history coursebooks, would the Katyń crime be a 'fact', a 'myth', or perhaps the question itself would no longer make sense in the face of the 'silence of history'?

The truth of a historical description appears to be a 'pragmatic truth': it may only be determined on the basis of a tangible—measurable—experience of the *effects* of the introduction of the facts into the discourse, of their elimination from it, or the impossibility of their acknowledgment (and therefore also the impossibility of their description) due to the shortage of categories allowing

one to distinguish 'facts' *as existing objects or events*, and thus to bring them out of the nondescript space of ineffability and into the space of relational epistemology. Eventually, historical truth is the truth *bona fide*.

Before I pass on to the analysis of the examples from the literature of the sea, it is important to consider the consequences of such thinking about history and historiography in the context of the truth inscribed into the culture of the West as a transcendental value. There is no doubt that truth is axiologized as more valuable than fiction, and therefore text classified as 'literature of fact', or non-fiction, command a greater degree of confidence than belles lettres, which, representing fiction, land dangerously close to 'old wives' tales'. Writing his *Rebels of the South Seas*, Lucjan Wolanowski officially presents himself as 'a reporter on track of the mutiny on board of His Majesty's Ship the *Bounty*'—and by thusly declaring his allegiance to the milieu of 'factographers', he is granted the trust of the knowledge-hungry readers demanding access to the distant world as a person 'writing the truth'. Yet, because *facta* are *facta-ficta*, Wolanowski the 'factographer' must first believe such a truth himself—unlike Herman Melville, who is an artist and a man of *belles lettres*. Writing his *Typee* almost a century and a half before, Melville creates a novel: a work of fiction, which (at least in its preliminary concept) makes no claims to expose any historical truth. The above notwithstanding, in both cases—as it seems—it is the sanction of 'truth' that has decided about the formula of the reception of each respective text.

Wolanowski gives his readers a guarantee of the 'truthfulness' of his account (i.e. its accordance with facts) by defining himself as a 'reporter' in the subtitle of the book—which is one of the many causes of his popularity. Conversely, the condition of the popularity of *Typee*—although by Melville's assumption, the text has always belonged to the sphere of fiction—was the official verification of the 'facts' described in the narrative and the external confirmation of the credibility of its author. Historians of American literature, however, are well aware that although while writing *Typee*, Melville drew his inspiration from his own biography (among the more important events in which were the episodes of his desertion from the whaling ship the *Acushnet* and his brief sojourn in the island of Nuku

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Hiva), he would, above all, make liberal use of the freedom granted by the novelistic convention, quite consciously creating a fictitious reality, which was his primary goal. For instance, in order to realize his artistic concept, he 'extended' the time of his stay in Typee-Vai from the historically documented several weeks to the fictitious four months, which in itself is evidence of fabularization. And yet, in the 19th century America whose reading audience would demand the experience of the exciting truth about the far away reality of the paradisiac islands of the South Seas, the 'factographic' value of the book—promisingly subtitled *A Peep at Polynesian Life During a Four Month's Residence in a Valley of the Marquesas*—proved to be a factor of much greater importance than its aesthetic value.

The readers would approach Melville's work with mistrust: *Typee* described events that 'were too extraordinary, and too much at variance with what [was] known of savage life, to be true [...]'.[9] The shadow of the doubt was only removed by the unexpected emergence of the eyewitness to the events described in the novel: having read the review of the book, Tobias Greene, the other Acushnet deserter and the writer's companion for most of the duration of his stay in Typee-Vai, paid a visit to the *Commercial Advertiser* editors' office in Buffalo in order to ask for information about his friend, whom he had already considered dead. Unaware of how much time Melville really spent in the Marquesas, Greene nonetheless officially vouched for the 'truthfulness' of the novel: his statement proved sufficient for *Typee* to lose its aura of 'incredibility', which resulted in its sudden reconceptualization as a work of non-fiction, a 'factographic' piece of literature. And because Melville had a number of reasons to wish for his book to attain the highest status and reach the widest audience possible, he not only refrained from dismantling the accidentally born myth of himself, but also took care that this myth should become the only version of history in existence. Since then, the fiction of *Typee* enjoys the sanction of the truth, while Melville himself basks in his fame of a travel writer and the author of a 'factographic romance'.

'When the legend becomes fact, print the legend'—observes Maxwell Scott in John Ford's classical western movie *The Man Who*

9. See: Thomas M. Foote, 'How strangely things turn up!', *Commercial Advertiser*, July 1st 1846, quoted in Hershel Parker (1996: 434).

Shot Liberty Valance of 1962. This maxim seems to best summarize the magic of the realism practiced by many, if not all, travel writers: believing in the legend, they first create history and them inscribe themselves in it so deeply that when 'facts' permeate from their novels into their biographies, they feel no need to rectify information that might deviate from the truth. This is why for decades Melville's readership believed that their author indeed spent four months in the Marquesas—and such information is provided as 'fact' in many important encyclopaedic publications, including the Polish *Encyklopedyja powszechna* of 1864. However, the same cultural mechanism that was responsible for the fact that in order for Melville's literary text to gain wide readership it had to become reconceived as non-fiction, also opened up the space for Lucjan Wolanowski—a credible 'reporter', granted an enormous credit of trust by the audience hungering for the knowledge of the world out of their reach—to believe in the power of a legend. Well aware that under his pen the legend becomes fact, he opens his account of the history of the mutineers of the *Bounty* with an introduction written in a language of a romance, in which the magical tale and factography blend together into an inseparable whole:

> The tropical night enveloped the plotter's secret council on board of the HMS *Bounty* with a shroud of silence. When the Southern Cross paled away in the firmament, Fletcher Christian mustered his comrades. By dawn, the ship was already in their hands. Her commander, William Bligh, and those of the crew still loyal to him were unceremoniously thrown into a lifeboat and abandoned at the mercy of the fates amidst the endless ocean. When the insignificant nutshell of a boat, rocked by the swell, disappeared from their sight, the mutinous seamen resumed their cruise. They did not know the port of their destination, they did not know what was in stock for them. Yet, they dreamt of a far-off place, somewhere over the rainbow, where the wrath of the British justice would not reach them: some island aside from the frequented nautical routes, where they could establish their private paradise already in this world, and where they could live their lives away from the iron discipline and safe from the cruel anger of their captain.
>
> They set sail to weather through One Thousand and One Adventures and make it into the wide pages of History.
>
> This is the account of their vicissitudes, told by the author who, two centuries later, followed in their wake through the isles of Oceania. (Wolanowski 1980: 5)

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One Thousand and One Adventures, like *One Thousand and One Nights*: that, in Wolanowski's book, is a true bridge between the silent fact and history. His awareness of the liquid nature of reality and of the uncertain status of historiography which always caves in under the pressures of the Authority, filled with an empathic wish to understand the human condition and the passage of time, renders his history of the *Rebels of the South Seas* a veritable tour de force of its author's philosophical self-consciousness. An experienced journalist, a sensitive observer, an intellectual—Wolanowski seems to be winking at the reader: he knows that if Fletcher Christian and William Bligh had not been a part of the magical imagination already, if the expedition of the *Bounty* had not already become the stuff of the legend—its history would have been unimportant, and the 'fact' itself would fade away like ink on the pages of ancient court records, yellowed with age. It is not historiography that drives Wolanowski to follow in the wake of the mutineers: it is the magic of the legend. And even if a similar 'reportage' could be written on the basis of the testimony of William Bligh and the documentation collected by the Admiralty—an expedition in search of the legend was indispensable, because it made it tangible, it gave it substance. Here it is the legend that calls facts into existence thus creating history which, in turn, legitimizes the legend itself attributing to it the value of truth. A truth all the more trustworthy because it bears the signature of a journalist enjoying the highest esteem among his colleagues and universally loved by his readers, a factographer who in 1980[10] gives the Polish audience a romantic story of men who rebelled against the tyranny and choose the path of freedom, yet a path leading beyond the point of no return. And it does not really matter that in the end the mutineers of the *Bounty*—after a short moment of rest in Tahiti—landed on a hostile, weather-beaten rock of an island at the end of the world, where nearly all of them died, murdering one another. It is inessential that the brief episode

10. The year of the consequential, tragic events at the Gdańsk shipyard, the year in which Andrzej Wajda symbolically produces Hamlet in the legendary Stary Theater in Cracow using the text of the play based on the translation by one of the most important Polish dissidents, Stanisław Barańczak, then at Harvard.

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of the mutiny itself would 'expand' in Wolanowski's narrative into many pages, while whole years of the mutineers' miserable lives in the Pitcairn Islands were fit into several paragraphs. What is important is that the people—desperate at the arrogance of the authority (here: the captain, second to God), hardened by the ruthless reality of the navy—finally rebelled against it. They took the risk, even though they realized that in case of failure, the consequences would be unimaginably harsh and that if they chose to take this step, there would be no turning back. This is why their act of defiance became legendary and the rebels themselves gained the status of romantic heroes. The mutiny of the *Bounty*—mythologized, inscribed into a song, made into films, and finally, revised in terms of 'factography' by Wolanowski's rhetorical gesture—ideally meets the 'demand for truth' which the Polish reader under the Martial Law would develop: the reader, who especially then may have dreamt 'of a far-off place, somewhere over the rainbow', where the wrath of the communist justice would not reach them. The mutiny, an act of throwing off the yoke, and then 'some island aside from the frequented nautical routes', where one could establish one's private paradise already in this world, and live one's life away from the arrogant government, away from the 'iron discipline and safe from the cruel anger' of the system.

In this way, through the discourse of Lucjan Wolanowski's 'reportage', which—as the motto overarching the argument of the present article clearly suggests—requires of the reader an act of a willing suspension of disbelief, the sailors and officers of the Bounty spectacularly made it into the wide pages of History, including the History of Poland. Such is the condition of the 'truth of history', which the reporter calls into existence for himself and for those willing to believe it.

THE IMAGE/REALITY. A REPORTAGE

In 1790, inspired with the events on the *Bounty*, Robert Dodd thus imagined the traumatic scene of abandoning William Bligh and those loyal to him in an open boat in the open ocean:[11]

11. Robert Dodd [artist & engraver], *The Mutineers Turning Lt. Bligh and Part of the Officers and Crew Adrift from HMS Bounty, 29 April 1789*. B.B. Evans [publisher], Date: 2 Oct. 1790. National Maritime Museum,

Fletcher Christian, dominating over the whole scene, stands in the stern of the *Bounty*, evidently relaxed, nonchalant in posture. At the same time, the tallest figure among the crew of the boat is William Bligh, standing amidships. Both heroes of the scene look each other straight in the eyes: in the final round of the conflict no one is significant enough or sufficiently strong to dare violate their private dialogic space. The mutinous officer and the dethroned master confront each other in solitude: metaphorically and literally, the duel takes place at a level much higher than that from which other participants of the scene perceive the ongoing events. Having lost his ship, deprived of his power, Bligh—humiliated, wearing only his underclothes—is evidently in distress: the prospect of sailing the waters of the open ocean in an open boat, close to islands inhabited by hostile peoples, is tantamount to a death verdict. Hunched, he makes one last attempt at warning his adversary about the gravity of his crime and explaining the horrible consequences the mutiny will inevitably cause. Gesticulating vigorously, he may still hope to convince the rebellious officer to change his mind: he does not *ask* Christian *for mercy*, he *threatens him*, he negotiates. Christian,

Greenwich, London. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mutiny_HMS_Bounty.jpg>.

however, remains calm: he has 'the higher ground'—but he is well aware that there is no turning back. In the background, the crew of the *Bounty* are celebrating their victory: they throw their hats in the air, cheering the prospect of the return to the paradise of Tahiti; others, gathering in the stern of the ship, watch the humiliation of their former oppressors with poorly camouflaged satisfaction. Certain that none of the crew of the boat will survive, almost mockingly, they pretend concern, throwing into the boat all the necessary objects: rapiers and cutlasses, pieces of canvass, hats left behind in the turmoil of the struggle. The crew of the boat, however, have already taken up their ordinary duties: mates and petty officers have already taken steps to organize the rhythm of work and get their nutshell of a vessel ready for the journey. The officer sitting in the bows of the boat clearly shows his interlocutor, the doubting sailor, who is in charge on board and with whom his allegiance lies. Others—do not doubt: they await commands. The confrontation of two orders—the order of the power and the order of the independence from the oppressive system—lies at the core of the conflict between the weltanschauungs of the leaders. Each of them has already demonstrated the magical power of their respective rhetorical skills. Bligh has managed to convince a group of his supporters to follow the British law, not to bring shame upon themselves as traitors and not to risk inevitable, cruel punishment—yet to live such a truth, they must risk their lives embarking upon an extremely dangerous voyage. Fletcher Christian has proven most successful in alerting his shipmates to the 'tangible facts': the cruelty and greed of the captain, his inefficiency in managing the ship's operations, squalor, disease and—above all—the lack of prospects for the future upon the ship's return to England. This, juxtaposed with the prospect of the return to the paradise, has evidently allowed Fletcher to present his own supporters with a choice so obvious that the return of William Bligh to the poop deck of the *Bounty* ceased to be an option for anyone to seriously consider. Robert Dodd's pictorial interpretation of the conflict seems to emphasize the dynamics of opposing visions so powerfully that it becomes central to the graphic design of the cover of Wolanowski's book. However, like the reportage itself, its 'facticity' undergoes a rhetorical and visual retouch.

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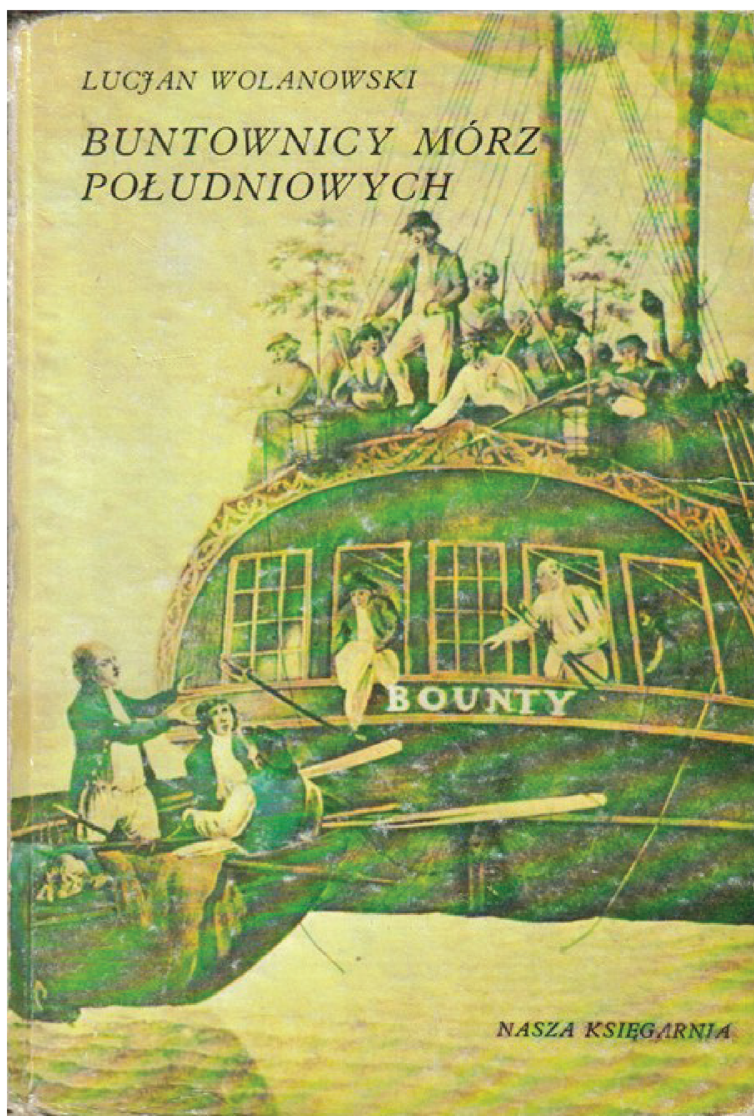

Dodd's painting makes it to the cover of the *Rebels of the South Seas* in a mirror reflection, although the word 'Bounty'—the name of the ship carved on a board attached to the stern—remains untransformed. After all, it is important that the stern with the name of the ship and the victorious Fletcher Christian dominate the *front* cover of the book, thus, rhetorically, emphasizing the idea underlying the title: were the painting reproduced 'directly', the 'heroism' of the mutiny itself would lose prominence. Without the transforma-

tion, the person dominating the front cover would be the betrayed ship's master, William Bligh, and the ideological effect would be contrary to Wolanowski's 'exhortative' strategy. Instilling rebellious sentiments in readers living in an oppressed country is an 'end that justifies means', especially that the painting is essentially 'the same', even if presented in a mirror reflection and slightly retouched: it allows the reader to see the whole of the 'reality' as postulated by Wolanowski. Irrespective of whether the author had any influence upon the decisions made by graphic designers of the *Rebels of the South Seas*, the whole 'transformative' gesture contributing so chiefly to the building of the reality of the storyworld of the reportage must have proven most efficient: after all, at the time, it was only a very small group of people who would have a chance to confront the image on the cover of the book with Dodd's original painting. The trust Wolanowski enjoyed would probably exclude the possibility of any doubt as to the 'truthfulness' of the image crossing the readers' minds. The 'facto-graphic' narrative, which made it to the bookstores in Poland in a substantial print run, has in itself become a fact: a fact, which Wolanowski sums up thus:

> Yes, this was a 'difficult' story, even if only because I have never had a chance of experiencing this journey along the lines of a proper, logical sequence of events. For instance, the issue of the visas: granted one, I would have to wait to be granted the remaining ones—and in the meantime the one I would already have received would expire, and the whole process would have to be started anew…
>
> The theme itself is well-known in the literature of the English-speaking world, but in Poland it was still unexplored. I wanted to offer a vision of this story not only in the 'archival' perspective, but also to show the traces it left in the Ocean…
>
> I couldn't tell how many years I dedicated to this project, especially bearing in mind the excess of my regular, run-off-the-mill duties in the editorial office.
>
> Was I successful in the realization of my plans? This is a question only the readers can answer.[12]

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12. A few months before his death, Wolanowski inscribed the quoted text of his self-commentary into a copy of *Rebels of the South Seas* owned by Mariusz Kubik, whose online archive has been opened to the public. The inscription is dated for September 4th 2005; the place of the inscription has been indicated as 'Warsaw'. Source: *Gazeta Uniwersytecka* UŚ (Special Issue), April 2006: 8.

As opposed to the fantastic ‘traces in the ocean’, the *Rebels of the South Seas* is not ephemeral: tracing the liquid discourse, Wolanowski’s apparent ‘reportage’ operates with elements of a magical tale and strategies of reversal—enjoying a license usually granted to belles lettres. Simultaneously, it relies upon the authority of ‘factography’. The masterful combination of the two introduces a romanticized legend into the sphere of reality, which the legend itself helped shaping. Wolanowski—the ‘realist’, the ‘reporter’, the ‘journalist’—may have ‘chosen to believe’ that he was, indeed, writing a reportage. Yet, even if this was not the case, his readers, both in the 1980s and today, continue to willingly suspend their disbelief identifying with the rebel heroes who threw off the yoke of oppression to sail free.

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RESISTANCE IN THE DECELERATION LANE

Velocentrism, Slow Culture and Everyday Practice by Marzena Kubisz (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag 2014)

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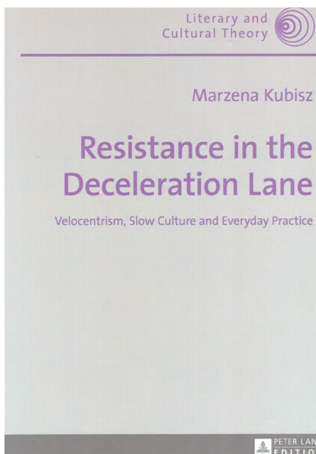

Even though our theoretical 'toolbox' is rather spacious, its contents, by and large, remain limited to the instrumentarium worked out within the frames of dominant methodologies in the area of humanities—both those central in the past and the ones 'in power' today. However, when we face new problems, or when (for any reason) phenomena allegedly well known unexpectedly become 'defamiliarized', it is out of sheer necessity that we tend to adaptively transform the tools at our disposal, to creatively combine their explanatory power, or to 'borrow' instruments from the toolboxes used by researchers representing disciplines other than our own. The last of the three cases seems to illustrate the option chosen by Marzena Kubisz in her *Resistance in the Deceleration Lane. Velocentrism, Slow Culture and Everyday Practice*, in which book the Author, recognizing the interrelations between economics and processes responsible for the development and present-day state of material and intellectual culture in the context of the major metanarratives of the West, makes an attempt at diagnosing a reality the experiencing of which is a resultant of the *topos* and the time. Such reality is understood as a complex (dual) effect of diachronic pro-

cesses and of the dynamics of synchronic relations manifest in 'tangible', non-verbal, yet discursively determined, space. Combining space (distance) and time (measure of movement) in one equation, Marzena Kubisz builds an instrument allowing one to adequately describe culture (which pulses in *both* these dimensions and *along with them*) in light of one, now common, criterion: the criterion of *speed*.

Speed provides the fundament to Marzena Kubisz's concept of *velocentrism*. In her book, Kubisz offers an original theoretical perspective, in which cultural transformations are gauged by means of the *topoi of velocity*. In light of her argument speed manifests itself as a unique aesthetic category. Its uniqueness consists in its independence of the Gadamerian 'moment of tradition', since—even though both the metaphors and the rhetorics of speed undergo transformations over time—velocity *as a phenomenon* remains unchanged. As such, it may be treated as a reliable measure of movement not only in space, but also between subsequent evolutionary stages of cultural history, the effects of which are visible in both major spheres of culture: material and intellectual. This, as may be argued, is a key component of the theory of velocentrism proposed in the book: as opposed to aesthetic categories born out of particular philosophical systems and rooted in particular time and place, *velocity*—unlike, for instance, *sublimity*—is free from temporal and spatial limitations. It never is an *anachronic* category; it never 'disappears'; it never is 'ahead of its time'.

Such a tool allows the Author to study the evolution of the culture of the West by tracing periods of acceleration and deceleration in its development, seeing them as a function of particular relations between the conditioning of the culture's material dimension and its economic, religious and philosophical substrate. Observing culture through such a prism, Kubisz is able to distinguish and explain particular patterns in the metamorphoses of human attitudes toward reality. The evolution of such attitudes, documented both in cultural texts and in the changes manifest in the material sphere of culture, indicates, on the one hand, the direction

of the evolution of the concept of identity and, on the other, it illustrates the succession of the dominant philosophical discourses, which determine the definition of a human being (in power at a given time), the relations between man and world, between man and the Other, as well as the ethical norms along the lines of which these relations are axiologized.

Speed as a category manifests itself as a culturogenic factor not only in its 'simple' technological (and therefore also economic) dimension—in which its importance triggers no doubts—but also in the area of *self-identification*. It comes in very handy in the *diachronic* analysis of the conceptualizations of the body (*citius—altius—fortius*), and, at the same time, it allows one to efficiently describe the dynamics of individual and social *synchronic* interactions, responsible for the emergence of such phenomena as ageism, the cult of youth, the beauty myth, or corporate work ethics. Studying products of culture through the lens of velocentrism, Marzena Kubisz arrives at an alternative periodization of subsequent stages in the history of the modern West, beginning with the 'age of the running start' (which, in her calendar, refers to the culture of the 17th and 18th century) up until today's stage of the 'streamline culture', characteristic for a visible tendency to remove all obstacles preventing one from instantaneous satisfying one's own needs and desires (constantly stimulated in the consumerism-dominated world). Needless to say, this tendency manifests itself in the drive toward the elimination of all and spatial and temporal limitations hindering immediate satisfaction. Adopting such a concept of the 'history of speed', it is possible both to indicate turning points in culture and to provide explanations for moments of crisis, after which periods of acceleration or deceleration ensue. Building her argument along such lines, Marzena Kubisz convincingly explains the birth of a new type of man (*mis-man*) as well as the mechanism responsible for the centralization (or apparent centralization) of the *Slow Culture*, for the transformation (or alleged transformation) of the system of the valorization of speed, and for the takeover of the attributes of *Slow Culture* by the late capitalist main-

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stream and their subsequent commercialization. This stage in the history of speed is referred to as 'post-slow': the commercialization of slowness becomes, as Kubisz claims, a *signum temporis* of the culture of today.

The potential of Marzena Kubisz's proposition, however, allows for much more than what has been described thus far. The theoretician demonstrates that speed as a category may prove to be a helpful tool in studies on Otherness (understood as functioning at the 'slow' end of the spectrum of possible formulas of existence in the 'velocentric culture'), territory ('new territorialism' vs. deterritorializing tendencies in the culture of globalization, as illustrated by the examples of *Slow City* or *Slow Home*), new models of community philosophy, or new types of ecological awareness, rising in the overworked Western societies. Furthermore, the category of speed facilitates the grasp of the essence of the new concept of pleasure, rooted in the dynamics of the relation between hard work, workaholism and idleness. And, last but not least, it allows one to efficiently explain the fundamentals of the immanent poetics of some new literary genres, which Kubisz collectively describes as *Slow-Lit.*

Velocentrism of the western culture, studied on the basis of cultural and literary texts as well as by reference to documented cultural practices, proves to be the driving force behind a plethora of phenomena, which, albeit described in fragments by researchers Kubisz quotes, have been presented systematically and fully only now. Beyond doubt, *Resistance in the Deceleration Lane* is an important study, which—meeting the demand for a new, modern theoretical tool facilitating the description (and hence understanding) of the mechanisms driving late capitalist culture—allows the reader to see thus far unseen dimensions of the allegedly 'obvious' reality. Beautifully written, erudite and original, Marzena Kubisz's new book may certainly inspire new directions in the academic reflection on culture, directions particularly important for the study of the Americas—suspended between slowness and speed—both today and in the past.

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(in the order of appearance)

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He has received the Distinguished Faculty Award of the John Jay College Alumni Association and the Dean's Award for Distinguished Achievement by a Ph.D. Alumnus of the Columbia University School of Arts and Sciences. His second book, *The Lives of Margaret Fuller*, was awarded the 2012 Ann M. Sperber Award for best biography of a figure in journalism or media. John Matteson is a Distinguished Professor of the City University of New York.

Bruce Robbins—B.A., Harvard (1971); M.A., Harvard (1976); Ph.D., Harvard (1980), Old Dominion Foundation Professor in the Humanities at the Columbia University in New York—works mainly in the areas of nineteenth and twentieth century fiction, literary and cultural theory, and postcolonial studies. He is the author of *Upward Mobility and the Common Good: Toward a Literary History of the Welfare State* (Princeton, 2007), *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (NYU, 1999), *Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture* (Verso, 1993) and *The Servant's Hand: English Fiction from Below* (Columbia, 1986; Duke, 1993). He has edited *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* (Minnesota, 1990) and *The Phantom Public Sphere* (Minnesota, 1993) and he has co-edited (with Pheng Cheah) *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minnesota, 1998) and (with David Palumbo-Liu and Nirvana Tanoukhi) *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture* (Duke, 2011). He was co-editor of the journal *Social Text* from 1991 to 2000. His most recent book is *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence* (Duke, 2012). A companion volume is in the works to be entitled 'The Beneficiary: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Inequality'. Bruce Robbins is also currently working on a documentary on American Jews who are critical of Israel.

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