

# Nebula

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Gerry Coulter's essay "Jean Baudrillard and the Definitive Ambivalence of Gaming" appeared in the SAGE journal *Games and Culture* (Volume 2, Number 4, December, 2007:358-365) – also available on-line at: <http://www.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/2/4/358>. His recent Article: "A Place For The Non-Believer: Jean Baudrillard on the West and the Arab and Islamic Worlds", appears in *Subaltern Studies*: <http://www.subalternstudies.com/?p=476>; An essay "A Way of Proceeding: Joseph Beuys, the Epistemological Break, and Radical Thought Today" appears in *Kritikos: A Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text, and Image* (May - June, 2008): <http://intertheory.org/gcoulter.htm>; and his quarterly column for Euro Art (On-line) Magazine: "Kees van Dongen and the Power of Seduction" (Spring 2008) is available at: <http://www.euroartmagazine.com/new/?issue=13=1&content=156>. Dr. Coulter's teaching has been recognized on numerous occasions most recently by Bishop's University's highest award for teaching – the William and Nancy Turner Prize. This paper is dedicated to Dr. Angela Failler, University of Winnipeg, Canada.

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# In Search of My Mother's Garden: Reflections on Migration, Sexuality and Muslim Identity

By Momin Rahman

## Introduction

*In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* is Alice Walker's 1983 collection of essays and reminiscences, in which she focuses on her intellectual and personal journey as a feminist, writer and, as she puts it, womanist:

Womanist, as she defines it, means many things: first, most definitely, 'a black feminist or feminist of colour'... 'wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one'. Second, 'a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as the natural counterbalance to laughter), and women's strength.'

A womanist also loves; 'Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.

(1983: xi-xii)

Following somewhat erratically in her footsteps, I offer a few reflections on issues of migration, gender, sexuality and identity. The impetus for this paper was a public lecture delivered in 2005 on women's history, in which I used my autobiographical narrative to think about questions of gender and sexuality in the context of Muslim identity (1). Since then, I have thought more directly about my location as a gay man in provoking the initial choice and formation of topic. In re-visiting this history with a keener sense of my queerness, I therefore weave a different narrative from the initial talk, but a central thread remains the topic of women in my family and the wider community of Bengalis and Muslims that I am connected to.

This alerts you to that fact that aspects of this narrative are a history once removed and, therefore, whilst these aspects are indeed part of my autobiography, I cannot claim any 'truth' for them except as *my*



standpoint on gendered experiences and identities. I mention this at the outset because it is important to say that I am not speaking for women, even – *particularly* – those in my family. How could I? Ontologically and experientially I do not share their existence, their social constitution or their social histories – I am an educationally and materially privileged, British born Bengali male, one who is both physically and culturally absent from most of the everyday aspects of the women’s lives I discuss. Rather, my aim is to explore how my narrative, delivered from my standpoint as a gay man, is inextricable from the lived experiences and political dimensions of gendered Muslim identity: how queerness is inevitably defined in relation to gender norms and their disruptions but how these norms are also ones of culture and ethnicity. I am not simply a gay man, but a gay British Bengali, irreducibly racialized in my queerness and thus occupying an intersectional location in terms of gender, race, class and sexuality (2). My hope is that I can usefully explore this queer intersectionality to understand its dimensions and also whether it can contribute to untangling some of the contemporary controversies of Muslim ‘difference’.

Even though I identify with many of Walker’s criteria, I will leave you in judgment on my womanish credentials but if, as Walker states, ‘womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender’ then I will be content if by the end of the paper, I have come across at the very least, as a little pink... (if that is indeed the color of ‘queer’...).

### **History, Narratives and Narrators**

My assumption is that history, by definition, only exists in the present. By this statement, I remind myself that narratives, particularly autobiographical ones such as mine, are constructions in the present, even as they seek to reconstruct the past. While the methods of narrative are varied, they have in common a reliance on subjective sources, whether that is memory, personal visual or written documents, or the extended, in-depth interview. This qualitative approach is in fact the inevitable option when attempting to understand personalized stories, but it just as inevitably throws up questions of epistemology, ontology and authenticity by placing the narrator at centre of our methodological nexus. The act of telling the tale is in full measure constitutive of the tale that is told: it is a crucial part of those interactions around telling ‘stories’ (Plummer 1995).

And so we need to know something about the narrators of history to assess to what extent their stories, their narrative constructions, are governed by their present social locations and motivations. Hitherto, I have tried to be honest about my position as a socially privileged and largely Westernized male, removed from the everyday life of my family. Moreover, the most Western aspect of my character – or so Bengalis and Muslims would have you believe – is my homosexuality. Momin means ‘believer’ and ‘faithful one’ in terms of the Islamic religion, and a homosexual identity is certainly a breach of this faith, regarded as a sin - moreover, one that we can choose not to commit. I have chosen that sin, chosen to come out and live as a gay man, an identity that has pushed me away from a Bengali and Muslim community both geographically and culturally, whilst simultaneously – in common with most homosexuals who ‘escape’

their localized culture – it has provoked a constant awareness of gender conformity and non-conformity amongst that culture.

Part of that awareness has been that the women in Bengali culture carry much of the burden of cultural integrity, although I am loathe to accept that as a purely ‘Eastern’ phenomenon (3). In many everyday ways, this means that they also carry the burden of history, of the changes brought about by migration, political events and discourses and the cycles of the economy. My failure to be a ‘faithful’ Bengali male has allowed me space to reflect on these issues of gender division, what it is to be a man or woman, but it has also forced me to reflect upon the privileges of masculinity within culture and how I still receive some of them, despite moving away from the culture, and, perhaps worst of all, having chosen to be gay.

But the truth is that I have never focused directly on these issues in my academic work, despite the fact that my work is largely about sexuality and gender. Literally too close to home? Perhaps, but also partly because I failed to inhabit an assumed academic identity by failing to engage with issues of ethnicity, even in my work on sexuality and democratic politics which only briefly touches upon the complications of assuming a universal ‘gay’ identity (2000). What changed was a change of academic location for a while – a semester as a visiting lecturer in a Women’s Studies program at the University of Maine – where they invited me to do the annual Women’s History lecture, thus provoking a more disciplined reflection upon issues which had been circulating for a while. The first telling of the tale was not reflexive about epistemology or content. This second telling of the tale has constituted the narrative differently because I am trying to be more reflexive about the knowledge I produce through my narrative, and how that knowledge is fundamentally governed by intertwined neglected narratives, and thus intersecting explanations of oppressions and ontology. The skills an academic training has given me have been used to reflect upon the personal; my existence as a gay man, the oppressions I felt within that identity, how and why gender politics and divisions create controversies of sexual difference and above all, what it means to be Muslim, gay, and Muslim *and* gay.

Epistemological consequences occupy and exercise me precisely because the ontological is what I am at heart attempting to understand. A relativist epistemology is by definition the basis of autobiographical narrative methodologies and I am secure in those implications, but I am aware as well that they raise uncertainties, ambiguities about claims to authenticity and perhaps validity. For example, I am removed from the early experiences of migration simply because I wasn’t born until my family had been in Britain for some time. As a narrator, I am therefore dependent upon the oral histories provided within the family – mostly, it has to be said, by my mother and eldest sister. And so another dimension of standpoints becomes involved which requires attention to the relationship between me, as narrator, and the memories I deploy of others’ memories and how they serve the authenticity I am trying to access, or construct. In this sense, this narrative is not autobiography but auto/biography, a term introduced by the feminist theorist Liz Stanley ‘to contaminate the idea that a narrative produced by a self writing about itself, and one produced by a self writing about another being, were *formally* distinguishable from each other’ (Broughton, 2000: 242). Whilst the deployment of memories in the narrative that follows is an attempt by me to perform some kind of audit of the self (Stanley 2000) of my ontological dimensions, it is also an auto/biography of the Muslim

women I know, and how my thinking and writing about gender determines my thinking about sexuality.

Broughton goes on to discuss how feminist interventions in this genre have shown that writing biographies of self and other have often masked the social location and epistemology of the writer; something I hope I am making visible. However, in my uncertainty about these questions of epistemology and authenticity, I think that I can only claim that I am producing a ‘queer’ narrative, one that acknowledges and embraces the uncertainties of identity categories and explores how I am located within, against and outside these categories as historical and political phenomena. While there are different dimensions to queer theory, I am focused on its challenges to ontological foundations, challenges made to universal categories of gender and sexuality, which often deployed within feminist and gay movements and ideas (4). As Seidman argues in his review of queer theory, it has contributed to the elaboration of those ‘disenchanted’ ideas that propose that the ‘subject’ is an unstable and arbitrary construction, forged out of multiple and historically contingent intersections of ways of thinking about self-identity (1996: 11-12). I am proposing that you understand this story as a queer narrative precisely because that framework allows for the uncertainty the narrative displays and thus shows an affinity with the intersectionality that I am reaching for. In presenting this history, I am made aware that it is a story of intersectionality and how that intersectionality renders me queer – there are never quite solid or definite identifications with Muslim, Bengali, or gay identity – a history of deferred ontology. Perhaps histories are never the whole story about the past, but they are often much of the story about where we are in the present.

## Migration

And the present day is somewhat amazing to me – here I am, the son of first generation immigrants, inhabiting a position of social and economic privilege as an academic, having used that profession to migrate recently myself, from the UK to Canada (5). Unfortunately, I am an exceptional case, in that Bengalis are still very near the bottom of the socio-economic heap in Britain, despite four generations of presence (6). Like many others, my family emigrated to the United Kingdom, or rather, East London, back in the 1950’s, from Bangladesh. Monica Ali’s 2003 first novel, *Brick Lane*, is named for the area in East London which became home to many Bengalis, congregating together as immigrants sensibly do, for the security of knowing that there are others around you, like you, who may give you work and housing and, indeed, treat you as fully human.

The family lived in this area before I was born, but we still have relatives there and indeed, the area is now called not only Aldgate, but also Banglatown, in recognition of the now well-established Bengali community and culture. However, my particular Indians moved west. Of course, not very far west, given the narrowness of England’s waistline, but far enough to live in a community in Bristol, a town which was ready for the spice of Indian cooking – or so my parents’ generation hoped. And there they still reside, having been there for almost 40 years, now in a well established community with three Mosques, wonderful grocers and butchers, and so-so tailors, but not widespread economic or educational success.

Migration is of course a rich story and it has many different dimensions, both positive and negative histories intertwined. My interest here is to think through migration as a movement through identities. Who traveled, and what were their identities, and what did we and me become by living within and against those identities? You see, in truth, although we describe ourselves as Bengali, my parents were born in India, and more properly under the colonial rule of British India. Partition occurred in 1947 and although Nehru – the first Prime Minister of India – eloquently described the moment as the partial fulfillment of ‘a tryst with destiny’, it turned out to be a bloody and wrenching event, creating two states – India and Pakistan – allocated along majority religious identification. Muslim Pakistan consisted of Pakistan as we know it today – that burden on the left shoulder of India – and East Pakistan, a geographically separate landmass, which became the independent state of Bangladesh in 1971 after a war of independence from Pakistan.

So, although we are now officially Bangladeshi in British audits, that State-derived identity did not exist until the early 70s. We have always been self-identified as Bengali – relating to the region in Northeast India that is a wider expanse than the state of Bangladesh. My Bengali father was born and raised in Calcutta, the former colonial capital of India and still an important city, but now officially in India. And it was my father who came to Britain first, working in and running restaurants, going home occasionally to East Pakistan, and my mother arrived only after the first few years, with my eldest sister in tow. My brother was born here, 8 years after my sister. By the time I was born, trips ‘home’ were to Bangladesh, although I went only once in my life, when I was around 4, and will probably never go again; home, for me, is the West, and now, living in Canada, more specifically Britain.

Migration is of course about journeying. But it is not enough to understand it as simply journeying from one land to another. Post-colonial migration is definitively about journeying through time – traveling from third worlds to first involves not only a change of economies but also a change of culture – how societies and labor are organized and how that impacts upon the possibilities of cultural practice and identity. If, as we sociologists like to claim, the ascendance of the West has been defined by all that is modern, migrating to the West has meant traveling into the future, from rural, agricultural and most of all, traditional, lives, to a system of wage labor, commodities, and smaller kinship networks. This traveling through time is a migration into structures of modernity, both economic and bureaucratic. And, as Stanley (2000) reminds us, the bureaucratic imperative to modernity creates the need to account for our selves, through official audits of self. We travel into the future, and our selves are remolded, reimagined in this future-present.

My family’s engagement with such structures is defined both through economic location – as with many from the sub-continent – work was the aim, over and above the welfare available – but such work is low skilled, low paid and often, in the catering and service trades where many Bengalis end up, subject to wider economic factors that determine disposable incomes. But for the generations that followed, the welfare state in its various forms provided the hope of a springboard out of this situation: from maternity and infant care through the NHS, through primary and secondary education through the local state, through the benefits system, from public housing provision and supporting and supplementing incomes. What a litany of socialized provision! It used to be called social security. But state, or rather collective, provisions are now much less secure than they were, and regarded suspiciously in our political discourses of taxation

and public provision, as they have been since the fiscal crises of Western capitalist states in the late 1970's. But I guess the point is that these bureaucracies, at a general level and well as individualized ones, created identities, or at least defined them to large extent, both negatively – the immigrants scrounging off the welfare state, and taking 'Western' jobs – and positively; perhaps they also created personalized routes for the self, identities now wedded to welfare provision, social housing, income support, all in support of low wage jobs (with low expectations of moving out of such socio-economic sectors) but security in the social provision so fundamentally absent in our countries of origin. Such fundamental changes in the way that lives are structured, represented and lived cannot help but impact upon the way in which those lives are inhabited.

## **Identities**

During this journey through modernity, my family have always identified as Bengali. Thus, whilst migration is a journey through time, that journey is undertaken within and against categories of identity. I do not think that any of us were ever actually Bangladeshi citizens since, by 1971-72, those of us who were already around were all subjects of the Crown – as British citizenship is charmingly defined. But were we ever really British? Not, I would think, in any full measure – it took until 1997 for British Muslim to become an official identity – in the sense that our head of state mentioned the British Muslim as a new and welcome part of British Identity on a trip to Pakistan and India. Forty years after my father first arrived!

There is little point in rehearsing the specifics of legal racism – how Britishness has been defined in opposition to particular ethnic identities. Suffice to say that while we may now see British South Asians as indeed British, and while we see curry as something of a national dish, British political and popular culture has agonized its way through the process of understanding and accepting difference. Indeed, we have the irony now of a political discourse that criticizes British multi-culturalism from the centre left (from whence it came...), long after multi-culturalism has become embedded to everyday life in many cities and towns across the UK. What seems to underlie such anxieties are more traditional concerns of social integration, social order and social inequalities, but in accepting differences, we seem to have lost sight of how to articulate that some difference still can be mapped accurately onto social inequalities. Ghettos are not just ethnic, cultural choices to separate, but have historically been the way to survive economically.

They may be a feature of urban British life, but the inequalities and separation they signify are not caused by those that inhabit these spaces. And separation from the wider populace is also, seen from the 'other' perspective, a logical social reaction to a lack of provision, and a lack of acceptance of differences. But of course, the crucial issue now is how these spaces also have become mini-cultures of their own (as if in practice multi-culturalism could mean anything else), particularly in relation to Muslim identities and the practices that these communities engage in. It is also not a wild claim to say that now – less than ten years after its emergence into the discourse of Britishness – the British Muslim is a vilified character. I am sure I don't even have to iterate the spiraling descent of this discursive transformation but think of the horror at

the 7/7 bombers being British and of the recent controversies around women wearing the veil in Western societies, exemplified in Britain (7).

My experience of this identity is governed by my own semi-detached attitude to identification as a British Muslim. I have never been comfortable with that explicitly religious identification, although certainly these days it is used to define and characterize a culture even though many within that group are divided by national identities such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi. My own memories of growing up in Bristol also mark out an identity defined more by culture than by religion. Furthermore, although we were different in many ways – the food we ate at home, the language we spoke, and of course, our skin – we were also largely westernized, going to school, learning English as our first language, playing with the other kids on the street and in each other's homes. My only concerns around identity would have been whether I was going to be Starsky or Hutch in playground re-enactments. Not so, I think for my parents' generation. They were of course concerned for us to do well in school, although they themselves had neither the experience nor the cultural resources to participate much in helping with either our homework or parent-teacher relationships. However, they were also concerned to make us aware of our ethnic culture, and in particular, my memories evoke my mother taking on this responsibility.

Needless to say, as a student I was a failure – neither motivated nor respectful of the need to learn the written Bengali language, or to speak Bengali consistently at home. And my imagination of the future had no particular direction, but was certainly not working in restaurants or running a shop, which seemed to be all that the Bengali men did. But I was pretty much left alone, a second son having nowhere near the expectations of a first, and regardless, not expected to carry the burden of family respectability as the girls were. As I grew older – I hesitate to say matured – I could, and did, cut my hair into the required buzz cut, stay out late, even drank with my friends, all in that void of parental half-knowledge and denial.

But I also became aware of the divisions between genders, divisions mostly of different types of labor, domestic labor, emotional labor and the labor of responsibility. Identities, sociologically speaking, are two-fold: they are both the self-representation we choose to adopt, inhabit and mould, and cultural historical categories that are assigned to us. Although it is right to distinguish 'identities' from the traditional sociological concept of 'roles' precisely because they signify a self-description first and foremost, they do not exist solely as interiority. Identities do not simply come from or exist simply within, they are a social resource, dependent on the possibilities of politics, culture and time and, in the very act of declaration, they become part of these social possibilities. And the current possibilities of Muslim identity are not positive ones; particularly in Britain, it seems that there has been a remarkably quick shift from embrace to abjection. If identities are historically specific, they must also change through time, particularly as we inhabit them and as the possibilities of history affect us. History, it seems to me, has moved in opposite directions when it comes to Muslims, particularly in relation to women's identity.

And this is interesting to me because my own identity, as gay and Bengali has also pushed and pulled me, shattering any expectations of linear progression I had towards liberation, towards integration, towards the secular equality that democracy promises. Rather, in the current political climate, it has rendered me

unable to exist comfortably as ‘Western’, when I had thought all along that as a gay man, I could not exist as Bengali, as Muslim.

## Gender

The idea that circulates in the west is that Muslim identity is inherently repressive for women. The debates on the veil over the last few years can be understood in this way since one element of this discourse is that the veil represents patriarchal control, both within the marriage and wider community. From Susan Moller Okin’s query ‘is multi- culturalism bad for women?’ (1999), to the deployment of the ‘imperiled Muslim woman’ in justifications for the War on Terror (Razack 2008), we have seen a steady iteration of women’s freedom and equality with Western ‘values’. Certainly, through most of my young adulthood, I thought the same, although in truth I am not sure I could articulate that as Muslim as opposed to Bengali – women were the barometers of cultural practice, and they were always two steps behind men in their freedoms. That is how I saw it, and I felt conversely distanced from the expectations of masculinity – providing, marrying, having children, being tough, stoic, leading (or controlling?) the women. I identified with the emotional openness of women, with the domestic labor they performed, with their abilities and duties to keep life going, by providing, managing, raising the children and, most of all, as we grew to adolescence, struggling to communicate, struggling to understand the very different lives we led or tried to lead, as teenaged and westernized, but still Bengali, still part of our culture.

In preparing the original talk in 2005 I tried to think through some issues that had been evident to me for some time but are absolutely refracted through my development of an intellectual career focused on sexuality and the inequalities of sexual identities. Being a PhD student supervised by the materialist heterosexual feminist Stevi Jackson gave me enormous time and guidance to read and absorb the theories that linked institutionalized heterosexuality with the stigma and oppression of homosexuality. The vast wealth of academic literatures in this area, and producing my own research contributions, have helped me to make sense of my youthful identification with women, with women’s writing such as Walker’s and with the lives I saw being led in my family; how not wanting to become a ‘real’ man may have led me towards homosexuality. However, there has been a change in how the women I know identify, and that has affected my sense of identity, suggesting to me that my youthful self-definition against the Bengali/Muslim identity was too simplistic and remained unrefined during my initial intellectual career when I was focused much more on how *I* was oppressed. Let me now talk through some of the reasons for these shifts.

First, gender is a social division – it is relational and depends absolutely on the notion that we have two groups, which are defined through an exploitative relationship. Even as I saw the oppressions for Bengali women, I derived much freedom from being a Bengali man. I had fled the constraints of that culture – or so I liked to think – but I did so by taking the freedoms I could expend as a man. Furthermore, as most feminisms have always understood, woman is not a unitary or universal experience, and it is similarly important to understand that masculinity is not monolithic, but is divided through class and ethnicity,

and men have to become men, as women are compelled to become women. Thus, men have the same impetus to inhabit the identity – the same power of expectation operates, although of course, the routes to masculinity largely depend on the exploitation of women. Beauvoir was correct to say that one is not born a woman (1949), the point was to focus on how culture compelled women into femininity. In Bengali culture, it seems to me that women could not but become women – there was no other choice, but I had thought less about what happens when men fail to become men. What happens when structures of globalised capitalism and racism deny routes of advancement to whole ethnic groups of men? How does their power in relation to women become affected?

Was I wrong to reject the whole culture and religion? – certainly it has constraints and responsibilities – but these are of gender and culture, not of religion, or rather, religion often becomes the post-hoc rationalization of existing cultural norms. And these seem to be changing. Women in my family now have expectations of women's rights, of women's access to education, jobs, and independence, and this occurs from within the cultural framework of being both Bengali and Muslim. Is this the benign influence of the West, or is it the sensible adaptation to resources and opportunities that were not there before the politics of feminism? For example, in common with many other ethnic groups and whites, boys are doing less well adapting to the new post-industrial nexus of education/employment. While they hang tough, speaking hip-hoplish about BMWs, bitches and bling, the girls drive past them in both achievement and expectations.

Do women inhabit the power of identity differently – are women better, because they have always had to be, at resistance? Creatively merging slivers of power to accelerate their lives beyond the apparent limits of 'femininity'? For the women in my family, across generations, the possibilities were seemingly contradictory – I do recall the identities of the 70 and 80s, and they were, by and large in terms of our extended family identities, western adoptive, perhaps not completely assimilative, but certainly freer in the sense of there being less traditional constraints for women, and encouragement to explore and mix in the new culture – indeed, there was little alternative since communities were not strong enough in number or voice to create much more than social gatherings at houses and restaurants. My mother smoked – how terribly modern – and she dressed in western clothes as well as traditional saris, she often went out with us socially, but she always had the dinner ready as well. My sisters went out, but more circumspectly.

I failed to become a man, a proper Bengali man, in the most fundamental way possible. But in fact, I had privileges over the other men, the other boys of my age; a private school scholarship education and eventually university; an overwhelmingly white, English and Scots world when I experienced it but one where I could fit in relatively easily, having learned the middle class liberal codes, knowledges and cultures at my private school and absorbing them more at university. In the absence of wanting to be a real Bengali man, it was possible for me to become gay, not to choose homosexuality in some casual performative way, but to live in a culture that had begun to provide space for association and the recognition of existence. But the existence is a totalizing identity – not just a sexual preference, so, although I am sure I was not born a homosexual, I certainly had no choice but to become one. Although homo-sex exists in Bengali culture, it does not exist as a social identity, one which individuals can identify with and inhabit. Moving across culture, space and most of all, through time – a journey from a pre-modern world to one about to enter



post-modernity has had consequences for my family and for me, allowing me to become something they could not have imagined as Bengali.

Those who migrate do so in search of a better life, particularly for economic opportunity, but mostly for security, not to deny indigenous or established settlers their own means of getting by. But they did not bargain for the world to change as much as it has in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for fiscal crises in Western states heralding the withdrawal of the state from social provision, from the routes to success through education being affected so much by this issue. And of course, culture has gone from being, literally, black and white, to bursting out in full colour, – multi-culturalism exists not simply as a political goal, but as everyday lived experience. Concurrently, gay culture has emerged in the West, as have public debates and expectations of women's equality. Whilst they may welcome the latter, as I see women doing in Bengali culture, they must resent the former – that identity that I embody – easily, or lazily, understood as the corruption of the West.

I cannot imagine how different this world must seem for those of my mother's generation, those from pre-modernity, but neither am I seduced by the notion that the journey through modern time is linear, or, put it another way, that the advent of difference is simply liberal democratic progress in its inevitable motion so that we will, eventually, all just 'get along'. Along with the explosion of sexual and ethnic and racial difference has come the inevitable normalizations within those communities – establishing and practicing their cultural norms in more institutionalized ways. The advent of settled secure Bengali communities, with generations of families, links with institutions such as councils and police, and the money to help fund Mosques, extra schooling in the Koran and Arabic, and a stronger political identification as Muslims can but inevitably produce greater challenges to other differences that have been establishing themselves during this same period – most pertinently gay culture.

I saw this change – this active present normalization of 'tradition' in my own family and the wider community in Bristol, both of Bengalis and, in my later home town of Glasgow, within the Pakistani community there. Women look different, wearing less Western clothing and more traditional Eastern attire, covering their heads more, and are less prone to wearing saris as well. It seems that these communities, my family, have become much more Muslim. Some of my aunts would not have their photos taken at my brother's wedding a couple of years back – a very traditional Muslim idea that only Allah, should create the human image. My nieces learn Arabic and they are forbidden junk food treats – once my main method of bribery. Are all those women I looked up to, all those women who helped me, even when I became the ultimate other, are they all now Muslim, over and above being Bengali?

### **My mother's garden**

It would be easy to say that this Islamification occurred due to 9/11. But that is not quite true. While it is true that the searing heat of that murderous act has burned Muslim identity powerfully into Western

consciousness, the consequences for Muslims globally are nuanced to the political context in which they live. Thus, in Britain, while many of the women I know see the War on Terror as a cultural and literal war on Islam and the poor who make up the majority of Muslims worldwide, they also understand it as a continuation of the decades old racism around immigration in the UK. Furthermore, those that I know see their Muslim dress and identity as a positive point of resistance to such discourses – as in so many histories of turning the screw – instead of obliteration, the result is stronger, more confident identification. Moreover, the economic and cultural establishment of Muslim institutions pre-dates the terrorism of 9/11 – it is more accurate to think of the transformation into Muslim identity as an inevitable outcome of time and immigrant integration – this is of course the established and now expected path of immigrants in the West.

The consequences of integration, of multi-culturalism are numerous and increasingly difficult, generating controversies of difference between majority/minority and minority/minority communities. One such debate is about state-funded religious education in Britain. Do we deny money based on the separation of church and state and the underlying concerns about the institutionalized schooling of gender divisions? Or do we accept that institutionalized racism within the state system has failed specific ethnic communities, such as Bengalis? Some see the establishment of Muslim schools as a way of guaranteeing educational success, for boys and girls, a haven from the commercialization and sexualization of childhood within Western capitalist culture, a place where the rigidity of religion can be used to achieve the investment of a good education.

I find myself uncertain on such issues, conflicted by my Western liberal secularist instincts and my knowledge that I am the only member of my wider family to make it to college level education, and that was largely due to a private, although publicly funded, high school education. Conflicted by my childhood experience of the culture as expecting less public achievement of women and my knowledge that now, the expectations of girls is that they will and should achieve, both educationally and in work – perhaps this just makes them more like Western women with the famous double burden to achieve good jobs and skills and also to keep their female cultural identity and integrity intact. But the expectations and sense of entitlement is good – my youngest niece recently announced that she wanted to be class president, but would have to wait until she got to a school that had such, dare I say, American, structures. And the difference I note is not that women should be, or are, Muslim for their husbands, for their families, although that is undeniably part of the context, but that women choose adherence, and this sense of identification goes hand in hand with their expectations, of themselves and their daughters, without the support or presence of men. I hear them talk about domestic violence, the failure of men in work and education, the need for women to be together, rather than isolated, to rely on themselves and each other, rather than men.

But I find it difficult that I have to understand these issues from the point of view of women who have adopted a stronger sense of Muslim identity within their ever-held Bengali identity. In respecting their choices and resisting the resurgence of racism Islamophobia has brought, I have also chosen to identify as Muslim in particular circumstance but, in truth, I prefer the vision of us living in multicolored harmony in the seventies – when the sun always seemed to shine, instead of the dour days of official audits compelling us, interpolating us, as ‘Muslim’ – what do they really mean? Brown? Arab? Immigrant? Or just this era’s

‘other’? As Turner argues: ‘(w)ith the collapse of organised communism in 1989-92, western politics lost its Other. During the last decade, Islam, and in particular fundamentalist Islam, has been constructed as the unambiguous enemy of western civilisation’ (2002: 109).

During this time in the 1970s, my father failed in business, and failed in health, carrying with him the effects of what we charmingly call third world afflictions, such as TB, although I hear that this disease is making a comeback in West. Of all the places we have lived, my mother talks about this house and time fondly. She talks about the house where we lived, the small council house, with her garden where she grew vegetables, hung out the washing and could manage to clean and house us all, whilst my father was sick, idle and on social security and we were all at school, except my eldest sister, who was working and preparing for the (then) inevitable arranged marriage. When she talks of this time and place, it is of the space – how it was manageable, peaceful – and my recollections are similar. Apart from the usual childish fears (the large dog at the end of the street), we roamed around the neighborhood at will, afraid neither of strangers or traffic, those twin anxieties of contemporary urban parenting, although I guess now we think of them as pedophiles and SUVs.

And peace, my mother talks of this as a stable time, and I know that she defines it against the recent past and present, ravaged by deaths and disappointments and the unending worry of the future, the lack of stable marriages, the lack of tradition – of which I have become, in person, both a symbol and a reality. After all, which Bengali, which Muslim, would want a gay son? But as I mentioned earlier, we were not particularly Muslim at that time, when I was growing up and later, when I came out. I don’t recollect regular praying, only abstaining from foods and drink that are forbidden, and communal cultural events gatherings that were amongst Bengalis, not all other Muslims. Now this has changed; modes of dress and religious observance are much stronger, and the identity is much more ‘traditionally’ Muslim, although not, in my understanding, traditionally South Asian. And the discourse of 9/11, with its stark oppositions of the West and Islam, has produced an double movement – as the Muslim identity becomes more stigmatized, so more people are moving into it, partly through the progress of history and communities, partly through self-identification and reaction to disappointments of the West.

Is the best irony that Muslim identity is giving women a sense of security? A sense of their own potential, and allowing them to articulate demands and expectations, both from Muslim men, and from the wider world so obsessed with their identity? When my mother talks of the time and space of that house, and her garden, she talks of security, but what she means, I think, is the peace of mind that security brings. I have had to accept that after journeying myself through cultures and time, perhaps the peace the women I know need, can be in a space where religion, culture, self respect and self worth grow side by side. Perhaps contemporary Islamophobia renders mainstream cultural spaces uncertain and insecure, and they need to seek out their own gardens, their own Islam. Whilst I may not be able to give meaning to being the faithful one, I remember that Islam has many meanings. Whilst the literal translation may be ‘submission’ to the will of God, it can also mean – and invokes such meaning in its universal greeting – quite simply, peace.

### **Not Quite Muslim, Not Quite Gay: towards a Queer Intersectionality.**

It's a peace I cannot share. I am not quite Muslim, although I have become much more ready to identify as such in those official audits of self that Stanley describes; going through airports, for example, has become a fascinating game of identity interpellation and resistance. My interactionist sense tells me that the official 'they' are often just as uncomfortable with seeing that totalizing identity – I am, after all, a fully fledged label wearing homosexual and therefore Western – but inevitably, resistance on both sides crumbles or dissolves into the easy, or secure two-step of interpellation and then identification as Muslim.

But I won't ever be the 'Momin' my father named me for because of my gayness, especially when the political opposition of the West and Islam traces the former with women's equality and as Waites points out, more hesitantly with sexual diversity (2008). I may feel more often interpolated as Muslim, and react positively, as a mode of resistance by being Muslim for that interaction, but that consequence of the War on Terror does not negate or dissolve the memories of other terrors; the terror of coming out, causing pain to those I love and terrifyingly, risking the loss of their love, and continuing to live detached from their everyday lives.

But am I gay enough? In truth, being gay has meant being Western in my experience. Perhaps not inevitably being white, but certainly being 'modern' – having to choose and socially construct a life in opposition to tradition, religion and institutionalized heterosexuality. And by default, modern culture has been 'white' modern culture: Western societies during multi-culturalism and gay liberation have not easily accepted either, but gay culture has often mirrored the uncertainties of valuing ethnic difference even as it claimed the validity of sexual difference. Our desires, our icons, our lifestyles represented within commercialized gay culture have been and remain an overwhelmingly hegemonic version of white, youthful masculinity. Whilst existing in that culture has not provoked terrors on the same scale as being racialized or coming out, I have always known that I am 'different' from the 'norm', different from the expected.

But I believe that being gay, along with having an academic career focused on sexuality, has given me experience and intellect to understand and challenge 'norms' and sometimes to resist them. Being a gay academic has allowed me to be a 'queer theory' intellectual, but then, perhaps my becoming gay could only be so with the inflections of my ethnicity, even or particularly when I was resisting those identifications. So my narrative is a queer narrative, illuminating the inability to be ontologically secure, but thus being productively problematic, akin to the way Cosslett et al. characterize feminist engagement with autobiography as 'disruptive interdisciplinarity' (2000:1). Disruptive as a queer identity would be, should be, but entwined within my narrative, or rather constituting it, are those issues of gender norms that render me gay, and render my gayness so problematic. And journeying through those have made me reflect upon the disruptive identities that Muslim women now seem to embody, challenging both secularism and feminism as Motha puts it (2007). The women I discuss would not see themselves as 'queer', but in the presentation of agency I have given, they are challenging the negative stereotypes of Islam and women, and disrupting the totalizing oppositions of West/East, freedom/oppression, white western feminism/Muslim female subordination.

That is not *my* story, but my narrative directs us towards these issues, suggesting, I claim, that narratives can illuminate the intersections between realms of the social, how understanding these intersections of identity dimensions are also inevitably about the possibilities and limits of identity within the historical, political contexts of what Islamic identity means in our post-colonial, multi-cultural, post 9/11 world. In this world where totalizing identities are being used to mark Muslims in opposition to the West – and its rights for ‘humans’ – interventions of this ‘queer’ kind, interventions that disrupt such binaries, are ever more urgent. Whilst I rage against the gradual but steady iteration of Muslim abjection, I see in my experience – limited, dislocated, removed from Muslim identity – complexities, differences, resistances to what being a Muslim woman might mean, or what being a Muslim might mean to women and how that ‘queer’ perspective has been developed through my gayness or, more properly, my queerness. And that brings me peace of a sort. Peace in the knowledge that I, and perhaps those in a position similar to my own, can productively illuminate the intersections and complexities of current oppositions and binaries within Muslim communities and families, gay communities and culture, and wider Western political culture and discourses; caught as we are – at every level – between terror, love and belonging.

## Notes

1. I was based in Sociology at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, UK, from 1998- 2007, having completed a PhD there on sexuality and democratic politics. In the winter term of 2005, I served as the visiting Libra Professor at the University of Maine in Farmington, Maine, USA. My appointment was in the Women’s Studies department, and included delivering the annual Women’s History Banquet lecture. As the focus was on women’s history, I focused on changes I perceived in Muslim women’s identities, from my perspective as a gay man. I found the change of location from my usual life gave me space to think through these issues, and perhaps I have returned to them now precisely because I have had another change of scene, this time moving to Canada in 2007, teaching in Sociology at Trent University.

2. Reviewing intellectual progress in the second edition of her book that laid out an intersectional framework, Hill Collins notes that by ‘rejecting additive models of oppression, race, class and gender studies have progressed considerably since the 1980s. During that decade, African- American scholar-activists, among others, called for a new approach to analyzing Black women’s experiences ... Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. (Hill Collins, 2000: 18). Hill Collins also argues for theoretical accounts based on researching and disseminating the experiences of those who inhabit the sites of intersection, enabling their points of view to be illuminated in order to contest established dominant perspectives. This locates her work and intersectional studies in general firmly in the feminist tradition of standpoint epistemology.

3. When Weeks talks of that ‘damned morality’ in his history of sexuality in Victorian Britain, he refers in large part to the emerging gender divisions that compelled bourgeois women to become the moral and

spiritual symbols of their marriage, family, class and national culture (1989). Western women in contemporary times still wrestle with these issues of reputation and the dialectical demands of being sexual and morally pure, evidenced in research done on sexual behavior, often in the context of understanding the possibilities of negotiating safer sexual practices (see Holland et al, 1998, *The Male in the Head*, for example).

4. Queer theory is a diverse approach to cultural studies that emerged in the late 1980s as an extension of lesbian and gay scholarship that ‘newly corroborated the idea that any form of cultural production is inherently ambivalent.’ (Hoogland, 2000: 164). Queer analytical strategies and theories are keenly focused on the exposure and demystification of essentialised *ontologies* of gender and sexual identity. Hood-Williams and Cealey Harrison explain that the deferment of ontology is a major premise of queer: ‘Hence, gender shifts from being a substantive ontological or foundationalist notion to one in which the attributes of gender are performative, socially temporal but re-iterated and, as Goffman might say, ‘giving off’ the appearance of interiority.’ (1998: 76).

5. I was born and raised in Bristol, England from 1968, and then lived in Glasgow, Scotland, where I studied, and then worked as an academic, from 1989-2007. I then fled the British academic system for a job in Sociology at Trent University in Ontario, Canada, about an hour or so north of Toronto. The local town, Peterborough is fairly traditional, mostly white Canadian and with no public gay space but some gay visibility and increasing ethnic diversity.

6. See, for example, recent research by Dale et al. (2002) which focuses on the socio-economic situation for Bengali and Pakistani women in Britain, contextualizing this within the history of Bengali and Pakistani men who have, since immigration first started in significant numbers, remained in low-paid and unskilled jobs and businesses. This is recognized by Government Equality bodies in the UK particularly in relation to the gender gap in pay: see the recent consultation and information gathering campaign, ‘Moving Up?’, details at [www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk), showing that both Bangladeshi and Pakistani women (who are overwhelmingly Muslim) and Afro-Caribbean women suffer from greater pay inequalities than ethnic white women.

7. A controversial public debate developed in the UK in autumn 2006 when the Leader of the House of Commons, Jack Straw, revealed that he asked veiled Muslim women to remove their veils when they came to see him as their constituency MP. The intersections of social interaction, ethnicity, religion, gender, terrorism and multiculturalism in this issue echoed previous debates in France (Ezekiel, 2006, Najmabadi, 2006) and sustained a lengthy discussion in British newspapers, television news and political programs, involving politicians, Muslims and, to a lesser extent, the Muslim women who actually wore the veils (see the article ‘Radical Muslims must integrate, says Blair’ in the *Guardian* newspaper, p4, Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> 2006, for example and a range of opinions and some anecdotal evidence that it is young, radical Muslim women who choose the veil on [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news)). The debate also threw media attention on the case of a Muslim teaching assistant who was sacked for refusing to remove her veil when male teachers were present, and who subsequently lost her employment tribunal claiming discrimination

on gender and religious grounds, although the tribunal agreed she had been ‘victimised’. See Vakulenko’s articles on the judicial responses to veiling and headscarves in Europe, in which she illuminates how Muslim women’s agency to choose the veil is being denied by both the legal system and some feminists (2007a, 2007b), echoing Motha’s discussion of how this issue presents a challenge to western feminism and secularism (2007). This issue is also prominent in Canada, with numerous instances of Muslim women being refused the right to wear ‘Islamic’ clothing, from a girl wearing a headscarf during a soccer match in Montreal in 2007, to a ‘code of life’ published by the town of Herouxville in which the council encourages immigrants to adapt to Quebec life by ‘not stoning women’ or ‘forcing ‘ them to wear the veil. Ruby’s small study of Canadian Muslim women illustrates the complexity of veiling as an issue that helps women to negotiate identity both within and without their own community in relation to gender, ethnicity and religion (2006).

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# The Clover and the Cactus: Nineteenth-Century Life in Southeast Texas.

By Julie Richko Labate

*With the assistance and support of the local community, this is a co-operative archaeological project, conducted under the umbrella of a proposed Irish Diaspora Archaeology Research Project (IDARP) in University College Dublin. Texas is a quintessential example of the need for historic preservation in the context of a wider global exploration of Irish diaspora archaeology.*

## Introduction

From 1820 to 1920, about five million people born in Ireland entered and settled in the United States of America (McCaffrey 1976: 1). For the most part these individuals originated from rural backgrounds, mostly from the west coast of Ireland, and settled in relatively industrial cities such as New York, Boston and Chicago. There is however, an urban bias in the historical analysis of the Irish American experience (Fitzgerald and King 1990: ix). This project aims to dispel some of the notions that have arisen as a result of this bias. Many Irish settled in southern states. For instance Mr. H. C. Bryson, from the north of Ireland, engaged in the cotton trade in South Carolina, Georgia and Mississippi for forty years (Maguire 1868: 236). Although the Irish did settle in cities in large numbers, they also settled in the rural West (Fitzgerald and King 1990: 2). The sheer vastness of America was a driving force in the emigration and populating of the States in the nineteenth century.

Between 1825 and 1836, many Irish settled in California. These were principally masters or officers of American trading vessels (Maguire 1868: 264). Similarity of religion was greatly influential in building an alliance between the Spanish and the Irish. Many of these early settlers were men of fair education and good manners, and principally came from the Southern provinces of Ireland (Maguire 1868: 265). Some became proprietors of extensive land and raised stock, other practiced as physicians, while more acquired wealth and repute as enterprising merchants (Maguire 1868: 265). For the most part, the earlier

Irish groups emigrated to America because of a “want of capital” (Maguire 1868: 1). Religion is also important because it may have been a major reason that the emigrants left Ireland.

John Francis Maguire recorded the Irish in America during the nineteenth century and enquired if the Irish Catholics had lost their faith as a consequence of their emigration. He set out to learn whether the Irish Catholics had lost their faith, or had used their religion as a defense. He postulated that the loss of faith would be “fatal to their material progress, would disastrously interfere with the proper performance of their duties as citizens, and would be certain to turn the public opinion of America against them” (Maguire 1868: ix).

Although small in population, the Irish in Texas left their imprint in Texan history during the nineteenth century. Texas was settled and revolutionized and its frontiers were explored (Flannery 1980: 3). The Irish began to immigrate to Texas with the English defeat of Irish armies at the Battle of Kinsale, Ireland in 1602 (Flannery 1980: 3). The Irish reached Texas and became permanent land settlers in the 1820s, decades before Texas became part of the United States, but they were not the first Irish residents on Lone Star Soil. They were preceded by two centuries by “Irish soldiers, priests, administrators, explorers and pioneers under the flag of Spain” (Fitzgerald and King 1990: 199). Thus, Texas has had a long close relationship with Ireland.

### **Irish in Southeast Texas**

Colonies were built by such pioneers as John McMullen and James McGloin who received a contract for their colony, San Patricio, on 16<sup>th</sup> of August 1828. The Imperial Colonization Law of 1823 stated that the Governor of Texas was instructed to apportion land either directly among immigrant families or indirectly through *emparsarios* “who should agree to being in not less than two hundred families. Each family was to adopt as its occupation with farming or grazing. Each farming family was to have 177 acres of land; each grazing family 4,428 acres” (Stephenson 1921: 7 see also Fitzgerald and King 1990: 204). The weather conditions of Texas were quite different from those previously experienced by the Irish settlers. Upon arrival, the settlers’ first concern was growing crops of corn and potatoes (Flannery 1980: 49). Crop planting began as a communal effort for protection from the Native Americans. They assisted each other in clearing the fields and planting the crops. Each harvest was distributed equally. Sugar and coffee were obtained by Mexican traders and Mexican culture played a great role in the lives of the new immigrants in Texas.

Since Texas was still owned by Mexico, all immigrants were to prove they were Roman Catholic (Stephenson 1921: 7). During this time, only the Spanish language was to be used in public transactions. Moreover, a colonist who married a Mexican was allowed more land than one who did not (Stephenson 1921: 9). These are a few examples of how the Mexican government influenced the Texan colonies.

In the late 1820s the government of newly independent Mexico, concerned about American encroachment into its territory, authorized four Irish-born empresarios, or land speculators, to attract settlers to its northern province of Texas. Small numbers of Irish people arrived between 1829 and 1834 to establish a home primarily in two places along the south Texas coast: Refugio, an old Spanish mission near Copano Bay, and San Patricio de Hibernica, located on the north side of Neuces River. Many died before they reached their destinations. Those that completed the journey found a hostile landscape in which they struggled to establish a long-term presence. In the 1835-36 Texas Revolution, the surviving settlers shifted their allegiance from Mexico to America. Many of them went on to play a significant role in American history.

Land commissioner José Antonio Saucedo arrived in October 1831 to issue land grants to eight settlers. A town site of four square leagues, called Villa de San Patricio de Hibernia in honor of Ireland's patron saint, had been laid out by surveyor William O'Docharty. In 1834 José María Balmaceda, the new land commissioner, returned to issue another seventy-six land grants. Local autonomy under Mexican rule was increased in 1834 when the municipality of San Patricio was established. Among those who confirmed grants in San Patricio de Hibernia were: James, Edward, John and Patrick McGloin; John McMullen; John McSheany; John Hefferman; and George O'Docharty (Flannery 1980: 40).

McGloin and McMullen received permission from the Mexican government on August 16, 1828, to settle 200 Irish Catholic families in Texas. After recruiting settlers in New York, the empresarios hired the *New Packet* and *Albion* to transport the colonists to their new home. Permission from the Mexican government was not an outright donation of land; the fulfillment of certain contractual agreements was imperative since the contract was only valid for 6 years (Flannery 1980: 31; Guthrie 1986). One of the stipulations of the contract stated that a certain number of the settlers must be of Mexican heritage. The agreement, however, was not met. Neither was the agreement that all should follow the Catholic religion (Davis 2002: 88).

The first settlers from New York and Philadelphia arrived at El Cópáno on the *New Packet* and Mesquite Landing and Matagorda on the *Albion* in late October 1829 (Flannery 1980: 38). They made their way to the old mission at Refugio, where they remained for some time (Guthrie 1986). They eventually chose a town site where the Camino Real from Goliad to Laredo and the Atascosito Road from Louisiana crossed the Nueces River. It is not known just exactly when the settlers moved from Refugio to the Nueces River site; however, by November 18, 1830, the move was completed.

San Patricio de Hibernica was the new town at the centre of the Neuces empresa granted in 1828 to John McMullen (from Donegal) and James McGloin (from Sligo). John McMullen was born in eastern Donegal, Ireland in 1785 (Flannery 1980: 34). He moved to Baltimore, Maryland with his family and then later to Savannah, Georgia where he met and married Esther Cummings, a widow with 2 children, in 1810 (Flannery 1980: 34). He then moved to Matamoros, Mexico to operate a merchandising company in 1825. After 3 years, he went into the colonization business with his son-in-law James McGloin who was from Co. Sligo (Fitzgerald and King 1990: 206).

The grant of this empresa was made in 1828 (Guthrie 1986). The first settlers for San Patricio (35 Irish

families, mainly from New York but also from Kentucky and New Orleans) arrived in south Texas in 1829. They stayed in Refugio as no settlement site was ready for them in the Neuces area. The new town of San Patricio was eventually laid out in 1830, with the survey being conducted by William O'Docharty and with McGloin himself taking responsibility for erecting the cabins ('factories'). According to an oral tradition the site chosen for the town had previously been occupied by Mexicans but was largely deserted as the result of an Indian raid.

In 1834, the population of the settlement increased with the arrival of some Anglo-Americans, hitherto prohibited from holding *empresa* land, and of a further boatload of Irish colonists, this time directly from Ireland. The population was now sufficiently large for San Patricio to possess an *ayuntamiento* (town council) with elected officers (an *alcalde*, or mayor, and four *regidores*, or councilmen). The town did not survive the revolutionary wars of 1835-6 as a significant settlement. Today San Patricio is a rural locale (population 200) that shows barely a hint that it was intended to be a substantial township.

After 1834, transacting public business in English was permitted and the freedom of the workshop was enacted (Stephenson 1921: 54). This reform marked the beginning of the Mexican government's loss of power over their Texan colonies. It appears that the residents of San Patricio were not caught up immediately in the revolutionary spirit that prevailed over most of Mexican Texas in 1835; however, representatives from San Patricio participated in all conventions except the first. With the help of men from San Patricio, Capt. Ira Westover and his men from Goliad captured Fort Lipantitlán in December 1835. In early 1836 the Matamoros expedition began to move to the front, with the intention of marching on Mexico; on February 27 Gen. José Urrea surprised Col. Francis W. Johnson's men in San Patricio and killed or captured most of the unit:

Toward the south near the coast the army of Grant and Johnson occupied in town of San Patricio, for, hearing that Matamoros has been strongly reinforced they has lost heart for their venture and knew not which way to turn. In the thru plane, Fannin with his expedition was at Goliad near Johnson and Grant (Stephenson 1921: 70).

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, Travis, whose force was concentrated an Alamo, reported that Mexicans occupied San Antonio across the river. Three thousand Mexicans were closing in on one hundred and fifty Texans. But so unfaltering was the attitude of the Texans that one can sympathize with the great scholar of Texas who called 'the letter in which Travis announced the opening of the siege the most heroic document made in American historical record'" (Stephenson 1921: 70).

Johnson lingered in San Patricio without a definite purpose. Suddenly "Mexicans fell upon them; their force was annihilated and Grant was killed. Though news of this disaster reached Fannin at Goliad, he continued to do nothing for another week. The Mexicans for once were more active than the Americans" (Stephenson 1921: 72)

San Patricio was ravaged and pillaged (Davis 2002: 128). The Texans were buried in the Old Cemetery on

the Hill at San Patricio. After the battle of San Patricio the Mexican army became an ever-present menace. San Patricio became a ghost town as the colonists fled to Victoria and other refuges, leaving their homes and livestock unprotected. James McGloin devoted himself to the development of San Patricio Colony and died on June 19, 1856. He is buried in Old San Patricio Cemetery. Later the municipality was declared a depopulated area, and so it remained until Gen. Zachary Taylor arrived in South Texas in 1845. He stationed a dragoon of troops in San Patricio and returned a semblance of law and order to the frontier town.

For the next two decades the city grew, as more and more settlers arrived and farming and ranching became more profitable. The overland Cotton Road crossed the Nueces River at San Patricio, and the wagon crews stopped to buy supplies and drink in the local saloon. Outlaws preyed on the wagon trains, giving rise to tales about crews who buried their gold south of the river (Guthrie 1986). Descendents of the Doughertys of San Patricio played a major role in the local education system. Robert Dougherty was a highly educated man who grew up in Donegal, Ireland and had taught school in San Patricio. Afterwards, he taught the Hidalgo Seminary in Corpus Christi and then returned as a teacher to San Patricio. It was at this time that he organized and established a boys' boarding school (Flannery 1986: 115). This two-story building is excellently preserved and stands near the McGloin house at Round Lake just west of San Patricio. In the 1880s San Patricio had several churches, schools, cotton gins, a gristmill, and a population of 200. St. Joseph's Convent, a school for girls and St. Paul's Academy for boys were established in 1876. By 1890 the population was 400. After Sinton became the county seat in June 1894, San Patricio began to decline. In 1901 a citizens' group persuaded the state legislature to disincorporate the city.

For over seventy years San Patricio was all but forgotten, until in 1972 the city of Corpus Christi sought to annex an area on the Nueces River that would have given it jurisdiction over the old town. The citizens of San Patricio rose to the challenge and defeated the annexation attempt; they reincorporated on August 12, 1972. An awareness of the heritage of San Patricio has caused renewed interest in its history. The San Patricio Restoration Society has used annual world championship rattlesnake races on St. Patrick's Day as a means to raise funds to preserve the city's landmarks. Enough money was raised to rebuild the courthouse of 1872 according to original specifications; it was dedicated in 1987. In 1990 the population of San Patricio was 369.



## **Refugio**

Pronounced ‘Refurio’ by locals today, Refugio was the empresa of the two other Irish empresarios, James Hewetson (from Kilkenny) and James Power (from Wexford). The site of the town of Refugio had been occupied in the eighteenth century by Karankawan Copane Indians and in 1795 it was the location of the last Spanish mission in Texas. The mission was abandoned in 1830.

Hewetson and Power applied for the Refugio empresa in 1826, proposing to settle 400 families, half of them Mexican, half of them Irish. Their application was approved in 1828, though only 200 settler families, again half Mexican and half Irish, were required by the terms of their contract. Moreover, their contract stipulated that their town – to be located at the mission site – would only be established once 100 families had arrived.

Various legal battles over the rights of Hewetson and Power to Refugio ensued and were not resolved until 1832. The first settlers for the Hewetson/Power empresa had arrived in 1829, and they shared the settlement site with some families awaiting grants in the McMullen/McGloin empresa of San Patricio. Once the legal disputes over Refugio were resolved in favour of the Irish empresarios, Power traveled to Ireland to attract more settlers, and he arrived back in Texas in May 1834 with, it seems, more than 100 colonists, although as many again had died in transit. The majority of the new settlers came from Ballygarret in Wexford.

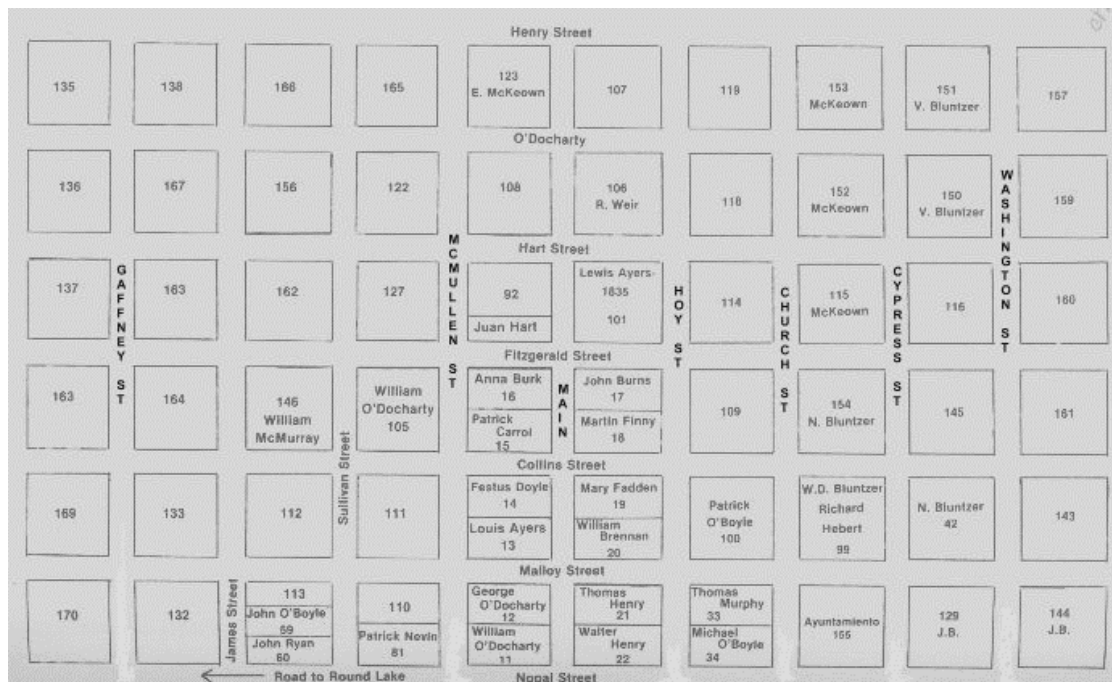
The town was laid out in 1834, with the survey conducted by James Bray. Unlike San Patricio, it remains a significant settlement with a modern population of several thousand people.

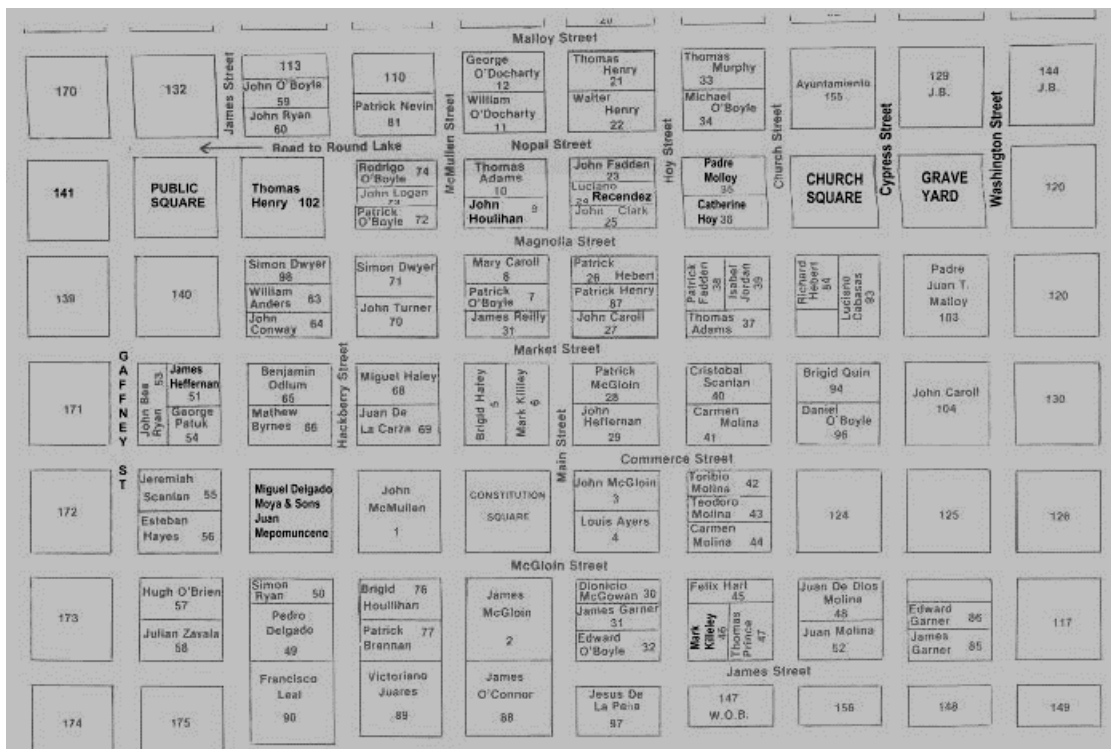
## The Town Plans

Both towns were laid out following the legal conventions for colonial towns in Spanish and later Mexican territories. House lots (*solares*) were square in plan and arranged along regularly-measured grid-patterned streets, with certain lots earmarked for public buildings, public spaces, and utilities. In each case, the central square was to be named Constitution Square and to contain the courthouse. We have especially good documentary detail for the layout of Refugio; Article 13 of its foundation charter, for example, tells us that

The block fronting the principal square, upon the east side, shall be destined for a church, curate’s dwelling and other ecclesiastical edifices; and that on the west, for municipal buildings or town halls. In another suitable place he [the surveyor] shall point out a block for a market square, one for a jail and house of correction, one for a school and other buildings for public instruction, and another without the limits of the town for a burial ground.

Nineteenth-century drawn plans of the towns – town plats – survive for both San Patricio and Refugio. An inspection of the copy of Bray’s plat preserved in the Deed Records of Refugio County suggests the original street systems and property lots of the 1830s are visible in both places.





## Archaeological Potential of Southeast Texas

San Patricio's largely abandoned (or undeveloped) character renders it the more archaeologically promising of the two towns. The modern north-south highway at San Patricio, with its scattering of modern houses, is the original Main Street and it still bears that name. Constitution Square still qualifies as the centre of the settlement if only for the fact that the Historical Marker for the settlement is located here (*right*).

Many of the other streets marked on the town plat remain dusty back roads, and in some cases they retain their 1830 names (for example, McMullen and McGloin streets, *below left*), while other streets have been encroached upon by vegetation through lack of use.

A number of the lots have modern buildings on them, but most are empty, and of these a good many are under fairly thick vegetation and cannot be safely traversed due to the presence of rattlesnakes. Constitution Square, with its rebuilt courthouse, is one of a number of fully cleared lots (*below, right*).







The lots that are of special interest archaeologically are those that are (a) closest to Constitution Square and can be identified as having belonged to the empresarios themselves or to their closest associates, and (b) are sufficiently overgrown to have deterred relic hunters. The McMullen and (James) McGloin plots (Nos 1 and 2 respectively on the town plat) are of particular interest.

Outside the town and close to Round Lake are two important mid-nineteenth-century houses associated with the early settlers. James McGloin built a new, one-story house in 1855. It is entirely of timber with two rooms (divided by a wide hall) and a long attic room. A detached kitchen at the rear was later connected to the house. The second house, the Docharty House of 1875, is a very substantial, two-storied, L-shaped house. No records have been recovered as to the layout of these houses, although according to one traveler, oral tradition explains in 1834 all the houses were the same.

The McMullen lot has seen some excavation in recent years by local amateur archaeologists. It is claimed that within the excavated area (which seems to have been less than one-fifth of the total area) the foundations of McMullen's house were found. Bill Havelka and Jerry Bauman, the principal investigators of the San Patricio excavations, recovered artifacts typical to a historical house site (i.e. military buttons, beads, a thimble, and other miscellanea) along with a site plan.

Through 1996 to present, Bill Havelka and Jerry Bauman have performed excavations in San Patricio. Approximately 1200-1500 artifacts were collected from 20 30 x 25 ft. units, which were 2 to 4" in depth (Havelka and Bauman 1996; 1997). These Artifacts lend insight into the settlement. For instance, cups and bowls do not comprise a majority of the kitchenware found while little nor no plate material was recorded, suggesting a communal settlement. English trade is evident from the (c.1830) hand painted ceramic fragments recovered. This costly ceramic is to be expected as most of the McGloin and McMullen family was affluent (Havelka and Bauman 1996; 1997). One of the most interesting pieces recovered is a thimble that is inscribed with "I WILL PROTECT THEE" No. 549. There is evidence of similar thimbles found in Ireland. A small pair of iron sewing scissors and a thimble were excavated in the northern cabin at the Nary site. The scissors, "found in two pieces were approximately 6.5 cm long and 4 cm wide, and either

had rounded tips or had the pointed tips broken off” (Hull 2004:10). The thimble is of a copper or brass alloy and has a phrase “FORGET ME NOT” scrolled along the bottom (Hull 2004:10). Thimbles were usually considered appropriate gifts from young men to young women since they were not too personal (Griggs 2001:82). These thimbles usually had inscriptions such as: “A PRESENT,” “LOVE,” “FORGET ME NOT,” and “FROM A FRIEND,” as seen in thimbles excavated at the Five Points site in New York (Griggs 2001:82). The Five Points area in New York City was one of the major urban centers that saw an influx of immigrants during the nineteenth century. This sewing object indicates hand stitching was a common activity, probably performed by women, and practiced in this household in Ireland. The fact that no cisterns, waste pits or outbuildings were recovered suggests that there is much more to be investigated in that lot.

### **Other features of the San Patricio landscape**

Old San Patricio cemetery is an unenclosed (and therefore indeterminately-sized) cemetery on a low rise to the north-east of the town. An oral tradition maintained that it was established by the pre-1830 Mexican community. The Old San Patricio Cemetery is said to be established on Native American burial sites. Some members of the DeLeon family could possibly be buried in this cemetery as well. The most interesting aspect of this area is that James McGloin’s grave is lost in the cemetery due to family feuding. Bill Havelka found new graves over the summer 2006.

The cemetery was ordained in the colonization laws of Coahuila and Texas, which stated that cemeteries had to be incorporated into the platted layouts of new towns, and accordingly San Patricio was given a cemetery within its town area in 1830, so it is unlikely that this hillside cemetery would have been founded after that date. Nonetheless, Irish settlers continued to use the old cemetery up to 1872 when the local parish priest, Father Maury, claimed it to be unconsecrated – note that it is not associated with a church nor does it ever seem to have been – and insisted that the main town cemetery be used instead.

The old cemetery’s condition is poor: many of the headstones are damaged and identifications are not possible. Among its most interesting features is the (c.1900?) railing that surrounds the grave of the Hart family.



### Archaeological Analysis

Given the large scale of emigration, Irish emigrants clearly fulfilled a number of vital functions within Ireland and the world economy. Firstly, they contributed to the magnetization of Ireland by transforming the geolinguistic map of Ireland and

“greatly reducing the number of Irish speakers in the country. Secondly, it facilitated the commercialization of Irish agriculture and made Ireland a major emigrant business in the world economy. Thirdly, it intensified the eastward drift of political power in Ireland and exacerbated its socio-spatial concentration in the rich agricultural heartlands and in the east of the country. Fourthly, emigration, particularly after the Famine, revealed the extent to which socio-economic life in Ireland was determined by forces operating at the level of the international not just the national economy. Fifthly, together with the Great Famine – and other Famines preceding the ‘Hungry Forties’ – emigration fundamentally altered power relations in Ireland by removing large numbers of young adults from the land just when they came of political age. Finally, as the century progressed, emigration contributed to the abatement of social tensions in family farms in the rich agricultural regions and in peripheral areas in the west and northwest of the country”

(Mac Laughlin 1994: 5-6).

Using selected case studies, the primary aims in this research are to document aspects of the material culture and domestic-spatial organisation of Irish peasant society and the diaspora during the mid-1800s. Secondly, this work will explore the transformation or resistance to transformation, of materialities and spatialities during the post-Famine era rent strikes and evictions leading to transnational diaspora. Finally, this research will explore how those transformations, or resistances to transformation, reflect four particular conceptualisations and negotiations of identity at critical moments of political, social, geographical or ecological rupture: the national/political/ethnic (‘Irish’), the social (‘peasant’), the gendered, and the ‘self’. The principle guiding this research holds that society is constituted materially and spatially, and that

sensitive analysis of any society's objects and landscapes of habitation, from the household-scale upwards, is necessary if it is to be understood in any holistic sense.

## Future Goals

Our project would be inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional. It would integrate conventional archaeological research (survey, excavation) with historical research and ethnography. It could be considered under the umbrella of public archaeology; indeed, given the importance of the Irish in Texan history (e.g. the Alamo) and of Irish identity in America, it could be conceptualised as a public archaeology project (akin to the project at New Philadelphia, a settlement with which San Patricio has affinities). Concepts such as the frontier (the Neuces valley was a frontier in the 1830s), memory (folk memories of San Patricio in the Mex-Tex war and in the Civil War, for example) and identity (the transformation of Irish and Mexican identities in the early 1800s) would be advertised strongly in the project.

This project should lead to an application to have the entire town site nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Thinking of the larger context, this project can be considered as part of a bigger IDARP (Irish Diaspora Archaeology Research Project); UCD's membership of the Universitas 21 group may be useful here. We could generate (a) an historical-archaeological methodology for the investigation of diaspora communities and for the integration of the different types of relevant data, and (b) a format for its on-line presence. We might envisage in five years from now an on-line compilation of archaeological data on the Irish overseas, curated by us. Texas today, Argentina tomorrow?

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# “Almásy’s Desire for Identity ‘Erasure’ in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*”

By Ahmad M.S. Abu Baker

*The English Patient* consists of two texts. The first is the one which tells the story of Kip and the others, and the second is that of Almásy, Katharine and the Bedouins. Each of these texts has to suspend its ‘other’ in order to continue. In other words, the presence of one depends on the absence of the other. Hence, these texts are ‘centres’, each of which substitutes for the other. They exist in a state of ‘differance’. These two texts join together to form a third or ‘triple’ text: *The English Patient*. They leak into each other, destabilising the first-text/second-text binary by removing the slash (/) in between. A ‘triple’ existence is brought to life.

In *The English Patient*, the narrator as an authoritative presence and ‘centre’ of signification is absent since the English patient’s identity is suppressed. He uses the third person to narrate his story. Jonathan Culler notes that “the self is broken down into component systems and is deprived of its status as source and master of meaning” (p.33). Hence, the narrator’s identity is erased as a ‘transcendental signified’ to allow the ‘play’ of the ‘centre’. Like the desert, the identity of the English patient is without fixed contours. The colour of his skin, a racial marker, is burnt away. He is Hungarian yet he is mistaken for an Englishman. “He had rambled on, driving them mad, traitor or ally, leaving them never quite sure who he was” (p.96). His identity is erased and he becomes the anonymous English patient. Consequently, he attains the freedom of transcending borders between nations, even transcending ethnicity and identity. Another example of how erasure causes free ‘play’ in the novel is the case of Kip. To him, bombs are a ‘centre’. He unplugs his human feelings and focuses on deconstructing the bombs, an act that is similar to deconstructing the text of a novel. Only after the explosion of the nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki does he look for another ‘centre’. In other words, after the ultimate erasure of the population, “[t]he death of a civilisation” (p.286), he loses his ‘centre’ and gains the freedom to ‘play’, to leave Italy and go back to India.

Almásy’s story is released when the English patient’s consciousness is drugged by morphine. “He rides the boat of morphine. It races in him, imploding time and geography the way maps compress the world onto a two-dimensional sheet of paper” (p.161). Morphine allows him to transcend time and place. In

other words, the ‘presence’ of his conscious is an ‘absence’ of his unconscious and vice versa. The binary opposites of conscious/unconscious exist in a state of “différance”. The ‘presence’ of the English patient’s self means an ‘absence’ of Almásy’s and vice versa. These two selves form the binary opposition English patient/Almásy, which in turn justifies the differences between the two characters (Almásy and the English patient).

The English patient, unlike Almásy the mapmaker, desires “to walk upon such an earth that had no maps” (p.261). These two “selves” exist in one body in a communal way. Hence, the English patient notes that “[w]e are communal histories, communal books” (p.261). This reference also suggests that the body is like a text. It can be deconstructed, and its narrativity can be interrupted by another. In the novel, the body is just like a text. For instance, Caravaggio’s thumbs are erased after his identity is discovered. The English patient notes that “I wish for all this to be marked on my body when I am dead. I believe in such cartography—to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map” (p.261). He wonders if he is “just a book” there “to be read, some creature to be tempted out of a loch and shot full of morphine, full of corridors, lies, loose vegetation, pockets of stones” (p.252).

The English patient narrates the story of Almásy under the effect of morphine. Hence, his authoritative presence as an author is erased, because his reliability as an author is removed. His use of third person to refer to Almásy also removes his authoritative presence. The reader is left wondering whether to believe the historical documents that detail Almásy’s role as a German spy, or Almásy’s own representation of the truth. Hence, reality/imagination and/or history/imagination are allowed ‘play’ since they are decentralised. This decentralisation creates the impression that history is just a representation. Almásy carries with him the book of Herodotus, *The Histories*. The name of the book itself suggests that history is nothing but a representation, and that there are many representations of history or ‘histories’. Nothing is fixed in the novel, just as nothing is fixed in the desert. Reality/imagination and truth/fiction are deconstructed and the lines separating them are erased. In other words, the slash (/) between these binary opposites is removed.

To Derrida, the stoppage of the ‘play’ of the ‘centre’ means “death”. He notes that “the absence of play and difference [is] another name for death” (Derrida 1978:297). To Almásy, ‘life’ is no longer the ‘centre’. He is “dead” in the body of the English patient. Therefore, he uses the third person to narrate the story. ““*Death means you are in the third person*”” (p.247). Further, “he reposes like the sculpture of the dead knight in Ravenna” (p.96) and Hana “dislikes his lying there with a candle in his hand, mocking a death-like posture” (p.62). Furthermore, he refers to “*Felhomaly*. The dusk of graves. With the connotation of intimacy there between the dead and the living” (p.170). He is caught in the zone between life/death. He is in a ‘play’ zone, which results from the removal of the (/) between the two binary opposites. Life and death are decentralised.

The death of the English patient will not stop the ‘play’ of the ‘centre’. The story will continue to take place again and again. Kip feels that “he carries the body of the Englishman with him in this flight” (p.294) and this suggests that the English patient transcends death. Hence, his story will live on. This means that



the 'play' of the 'centre' will continue since it is "infinitely redoubling" (Derrida 1978:297). "*And my words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth. Nor out of the mouth of thy seed. Nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed*" (p.294). These words of Isaiah also suggest the continuation of the 'play' of the centre. More to the point, the references to medieval wars as being similar to modern ones, and the reference to "the Tree of Good and Evil inserted into the mouth of the dead Adam" (pp.69-70) suggest "infinite redoubling", 'play' and/or 'repetition' since they imply that present events are an echo of and caused by past events.

Brandabur highlights the presence of "the question of namelessness which runs through the narrative" (2000). This namelessness is a form 'erasure'. Ondaatje burns out the defining white skin of the English patient, makes Europeans "desert Europeans", and removes the blue eyes of the dead Katharine Clifton who hated to die without a name, hated deserts, and wanted green fields with water, and whose bones withered away from the burning plane and became somehow united in a mystical experience with the desert, which removes all identification.

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# The Seven Ages of Kylie Minogue: Postmodernism, Identity, and Performative Mimicry.

By Lee Barron

God's in his heaven, Kylie's at number one, surely nothing really bad can happen (Bryan Appleyard, the *Sunday Times*, cited in Smith 187).

I never imagined what impact a 50p pair of hotpants would have (Kylie Minogue, *Kylie*, 2007: 12).

## The (Second) Postmodern Pop Diva

Kylie Minogue's Creative Director, William Baker, states that his book *Kylie: La La La* is 'an unashamed homage to pop's schizophrenia and the multiple identities contained within the tiny body of Kylie Minogue, from her roots in a Melbourne soap opera to her tour, *KylieFever 2002*' (4). This conception of the 'multiple identities' of Kylie Minogue is the key aspect I will explore in this paper, as she is a figure whose 'identity' has continuously transformed throughout her career, so much so that, in 2007, costumes displaying her continually changing images from 1987 to her *Showgirl* tour were the subject of *Kylie – The Exhibition*, staged initially at the Art Centre's Performing Arts Collection in Melbourne (and attracting almost 500,000 visitors), then travelling to the United Kingdom and displayed in various venues, but most notably the Victoria and Albert Museum (Barrand, 2007).

In this regard, Minogue arguably shares similarities with other performers who manifest chameleonic qualities, such as David Bowie, and of course, Madonna, the long-established "Queen of Appropriation" (Appignanesi and Garratt 148). Commenting on the fluid sense of identity and constant reinvention of image undertaken by Madonna throughout her career, Gauntlett states that:

Other female stars have found that a regular change of theme, image and/or style can help to

extend a career – Kylie Minogue, in particular, has stretched her pop career from the 1980s to the present, partly by reinventing herself as ‘indie Kylie’, ‘dance Kylie’ and ‘disco Kylie’ (172).

Hence, as the 1980s drew to a close, Madonna would have, not a ‘child’ but rather a ‘sister’ in terms of a female pop performer who would become equally synonymous with re-invention and performative identity-evolution. And Kylie Minogue herself acknowledges the influence of Madonna, stating that: ‘Madonna has definitely influenced me...as have lots of other people, men and women. I would say Madonna influences me generally rather than specifically.’ (Scatena 182). Here, Minogue’s acceptance of Madonna’s influence is qualified by a tone that asserts Minogue’s own sense of independent identity and identities. And, as I will point out, although Minogue does pay homage to Madonna, she is no mere imitator, but rather, she too is a performer characterized by image flux. As Odone states of Minogue’s career:

Kylie – through a process of endless reinventions that have seen her as a soap star in permed poodle’s curls, a pop crooner boasting a No 1 hit, and a bronco-riding nude advertising for a lingerie company – has ended up being much more: a singing sensation who flirts with porn, dangerous liaisons and scandalous behaviour, yet somehow that what she really wants is a big hug from you (in Stanley-Clarke and Goodall 218).

Whilst Madonna’s fluid, ever-changing ‘postmodern’ public persona has long been documented (Tetzlaff, 1993), Kylie Minogue’s career would develop in an equally transformative mode. Therefore, rather than simply representing, amongst the Spice Girls, Britney Spears, Pink, and Destiny’s Child, one of Madonna’s empowered ‘daughters’ (Gauntlett), Minogue would constitute a further exemplar of contemporary image reformulation within pop music with her ‘ever-changing Kylie image’ (Martin 44). Therefore, within this article, I will explore and analyze Kylie Minogue’s ‘postmodern chameleon’ sensibilities in relation to the differing personas and looks that have marked a musical career now spanning three decades and that has illustrated ‘a performative self endlessly adapting to a fluid environment’ (Rogers 136). Drawing upon the approaches of Kellner, Hall, Sontag and Caillois, I will argue that Kylie Minogue represents a key contemporary postmodern performer, whose progressive image changes have moved from market-driven imperatives, to a reflexive, self-aware conception of image evolution and transformation.

### **Constructing and Deconstructing Kylie**

As Kellner (1992) argues, within ‘traditional’ societies, identity was perceived to be fixed, solid, and stable, a function of predefined social roles. Within the ‘age of modernity,’ identity becomes more ‘mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive, and subject to change and innovation. Yet the forms of identity in modernity are also relatively substantial and fixed; identity still comes from a circumscribed set of roles and norms (141). However, ‘from the postmodern perspective, as the pace, extension, and complexity of modern societies accelerate, identity becomes more and more unstable, more and more fragile’ a process

whereby identity is a game that one plays, so that one can easily shift from one identity to another (153). As Hall articulates:

The Postmodern subject is conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self.' Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about... The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy (277).

Postmodern identity is consequently constituted theatrically, and so, in the contemporary world it is possible to change identities, to switch with the changing 'winds of fashion' (Kellner, 1992). Therefore, it is argued, one can always change one's life because identity can always be reconstructed. It is grounded in game playing, and specifically, mimicry. In addition to *agon*, *alea* and *ilinx* within the classification of games, as articulated by Caillois, there is a fourth concept – mimicry. For Caillois, 'all play presupposes the temporary acceptance, if not of an illusion (indeed this last word means nothing less than beginning a game: *in-lusio*), then at least of a closed...imaginary universe' (19). Play, in this sense, which Caillois terms 'mimicry,' involves 'make-believe,' the shedding of identity whereby the player engages in masquerade, and the crux of mimicry is 'incessant invention' (23). Moreover, although critics of such fluid conceptions (such as Caillois) draw attention to the means by which those who experience limited economic means could engage in such theatricality, such a postmodern playful vision is discernible within popular music (and not only pop, the masked, American 'rap-core' band Slipknot spring to mind here), and, as I will argue, potently reflected in the career of Kylie Minogue. Although Minogue's career is linked with costume and fashion, having worn clothing by designers such as Karl Lagerfeld, Julien Macdonald, Dolce & Gabbana, John Galiano, and Stella McCartney, Minogue has also consistently engaged in a process of invention' in relation to her performative personas, and who is, I will argue, an exponent of cultural mimicry via her adoption of successive 'masks.'

In the course of her recording career Kylie Minogue has progressed from the critically derided 'Singing Budgie' of the late-1980s, a British tabloid-inspired derogation equating Kylie's voice with that tinnily-voiced domestic bird, to a 21st century credible, sophisticated pop performer. As Kaplan states:

In the past, with stars like Paul Anka, Elvis Presley, even the early Beatles or the Stones, the image that a star decided to promote remained relatively stable once a formula that produced commercial success had been found (155).

However, within the post-MTV musical world in which pop/rock star images are transmitted repeatedly, Kaplan argues, image change becomes more rapid as a means to stave off consumer boredom. Yet, certain genres of music embrace this idea more than others, and with regard to 'pop', it is perhaps an ingrained aspect, because, as Klein observes: 'Pop has always had fluid boundaries...Pop constantly changes its

faces and meanings' (42) – a perception that would reflect the career of Kylie Minogue perfectly – and to consequently exhibit an increasing sense of self-reflexivity. As Minogue stated:

I change characters when I do a photo-shoot. I'm like the eight-year old with the dressing-up box. It's kind of avoiding being me – rather than being captured, I become a new character and let that take over (cited in Stanley-Clarke and Goodall 190).

In examining Kylie Minogue's recording career retrospectively, a series of distinctive phases and 'personas' can be identified which have arisen as a process of direction, evolution and, latterly, of intentional choice: 'Cute Kylie,' 'Sex Kylie,' 'Dance Kylie,' 'Gothic Kylie,' 'Indie Kylie,' 'Camp Kylie' and 'Cyber-Kylie.' As noted earlier, Gauntlett identifies a similar typology (although this only extends to 'indie Kylie,' 'dance Kylie' and 'disco Kylie') within his analysis of Madonna. I will expand upon this and fully explore the nature of each 'persona,' because they are each significant and they raise crucial issues concerning the expression of fluid pop identities. Moreover, Kylie Minogue, with a music career spanning three decades, is a significant pop performer. And while she may never have attained the global visibility of Madonna, she has (especially in the UK and Australia) proved to be an enduring cultural presence. Therefore, I will now chart and analyze the 'seven ages of Kylie Minogue,' in historical sequence, beginning with her first incarnation, 'Cute Kylie.'

## Cute Kylie

Kylie Minogue's career began in childhood acting. While she was still a child, she appeared in Australian television dramas such as *The Sullivans*, *Skyways* and *The Henderson Kids*. However, it was at the age of 17 that she achieved mainstream cultural prominence when she was cast in the role of would-be mechanic Charlene Mitchell in the Australian soap opera *Neighbours*. Minogue would play Charlene from April 1986 to June 1988, gaining popularity both in Australia and in Britain for her 'unapologetic ordinariness' (Conrad 4) and cute, spunky tomboy qualities. Minogue would become iconic via the initially tomboyish Charlene due to the character's on-screen romance and subsequent marriage to 'teenage heart-throb' Scott Robinson (Jason Donovan), an episode which was a significant ratings success for the soap in the UK. It was in this 'Charlene' period that she also made her first foray into the world of popular music, recording *The Locomotion*, the Little Eva song from the 1960s, for Mushroom Records, which would ultimately reach the position of #1 in the Australian charts in July 1987. Subsequently, Minogue signed a recording contract with the British writer-producer team Stock, Aitken and Waterman (SAW):

Between the three of them, they understood the fundamental rules of classic pop music. Probably more than any other producer at that time. Simple chords, irresistible choruses, clear and powerful vocals, lively beat, undemanding lyrics and warm atmospherics (Stanley-Clarke and Goodall 58).

Minogue's first ten singles for SAW produced four # 1 hits, five that reached #2, and one attained the position of #4. Moreover, she had hits overseas, in America, Europe and Australia (Bilmes, 2005). This recording success began with the track 'I Should Be So Lucky,' released in December 1987 and achieving the #1 spot simultaneously in the British and Australian charts.

'I Should Be So Lucky' deliberately exploited the 'cute' aspect of Minogue's *Neighbours* character to the extent that it 'was a song that the public could believe was sung by Charlene and there was little attempt to separate the two personas' (Minogue and Baker 32). The song is marked by a repetitive 'catchy' chorus and an inoffensive, keyboard-dominated tune with the SAW in-built musical format of 120 beats-per-minute to instill an upbeat quality to the music (Bond 2003). However, it was the video which precisely demarcated the 'Cute Kylie' image. The video depicts Kylie dreamily thinking about a potential boyfriend and dancing in various rooms of an apartment, but particularly within her bedroom, a practice McRobbie typifies as the archetypal behaviour of teenage girls indulging in 'fantasy, daydreaming, and 'abandon' (1984 134). Indeed, the lyrical refrain that leads to the chorus is: "But dreaming's all I do/If only they'd come true." In this sense, the longing aspect of the video performance and lyrics evokes the classic conception of romantic love as that love which, like the dance that accompanies it, 'breaks the routine and drudgery of ordinary life' (Bertilsson 313). The dominant tone of the video is conspicuously innocent, with the emphasis on teen romance in place of overt sexuality. This concept was reinforced by the subsequent single 'Especially For You,' a duet ballad which re-united Kylie with Jason Donovan in a romantic plot which saw the erstwhile lovers continually miss each other at a series of locations. Even the final meeting and embrace ends in a freeze-frame, denying the couple a kiss, perfectly paralleling (and exploiting) 'Charlene and Scott's chaste teenage romance' (Scatena xii), but the freeze was also a means of tantalizing the fans of both performers and was consequently pitched at both Minogue and Donovan fans, both of whom were SAW artists.

Variations on the 'romance' theme subsequently included the period-sets of "Je Ne Sais Pas Pourquoi" (1940s setting) and "Tears on My Pillow" (1950s setting), which also depicted a romantic sensibility, yet within a cultural-historical context. This early phase of Minogue's career was typified by bright clothing colours, simple dance moves and upbeat music, with love as the leitmotif, but always strictly in a romantic context, never sexual. However, in the early 1990s, this would change and Charlene would be dramatically discarded as Cute Kylie unexpectedly blossomed into 'Sex Kylie.'

## Sex Kylie

Evolving from 'Cute Kylie,' Minogue's second persona emerged in the early 1990s and reflected a growing sense of cultural legitimacy regarding Minogue's image, whereby she transcended appearing exclusively within pop music magazines and began to grace the cover of 'style bibles' such as *The Face* and *i-D*. Moreover, her image was a conscious and radical departure from the 'cute Kylie' representation of SAW's earlier productions. Significantly, the music also differed from her initial formula, consisting

now of a slightly harder, dance-infused edge, as with her *Rhythm of Love* recording, a sound even flirting with R&B influences on the 'Let's get To It' album' (although, Minogue would again flirt with R&B on her 2003 album, *Body Language*). Correspondingly, the video performances saw an identifiably erotic, sexualized content that was conspicuously lacking in 'I Should Be So Lucky.' For many commentators, this was the result of Minogue's relationship with Michael Hutchence, the lead singer of Australian rock group INXS, because:

Michael had been very aware of his image, both in terms of his media image and his personal style. Kylie learned from him the power of sexuality...She had never really enjoyed her body let alone displayed it in videos or photographs. Suddenly the clothes came off as she reveled in being a sexy twenty-one-year-old...Prior to Hutchence, she was demure and coy, as if she didn't really possess a sex life or sexuality (Baker and Minogue 32).

At one level, some critics charged that Minogue was merely aping the overt sexuality of Madonna (Scatena); however, irrespective of any potential Madonna influences, this period did represent a marked transformation of the Minogue persona. The videos for 'Better the Devil You Know,' 'What Do I Have To Do' and 'Shocked' now placed the emphasis firmly upon exposed bodies, both Minogue's and those of male and female dancers. Indeed, dance was central to these performances and unlike 'I Should Be So Lucky,' it was now a mode of locomotion that was "redolent with sexual tensions and possibilities" (Frith 180). Hence, 'Better the Devil You Know' visually depicted Minogue in a series of short dresses, frequently with the shoulder straps teasingly falling away, and dancing in hot pants with bra combinations, flanked by male dancers stripped to the waist and displaying muscular torsos. A further scene frames Minogue being slowly caressed from behind by one of these dancers, with a hint of a post-coital vibe (Sheridan) to the scene. Thus, if the visual tone was a move away from 'Cute Kylie,' the lyrical theme, that of taking back an unfaithful lover (with the onus placed firmly upon sexual dependency), replacing any sense of demure coyness. Indeed, the song 'What Do I Have To Do' reprised the sentiment of 'I Should Be So Lucky,' but now overtly sexualized it in the line: "There ain't a single night/I haven't held you tight/It's always inside my head/Never inside my bed." The accompanying video, shot in a fusion of moody black-and-white and garish colour sequences, extended the notion of sexual longing of 'What Do I Have To Do' but added a more manifest sense of sexual abandon. The framing plot is a tale of unrequited sexual connection between a handsome man and Minogue in which the man is cast in the role of voyeur within a nightclub, with Minogue teasing him with a number of approaches to men, and in some sequences, a vampish Minogue dances suggestively with another women. Yet, the video also reveals its playfulness with images of Minogue sporting a panther tattoo, and a shot of her engaged in domestic labour, ironing board in hand. However, if 'What Do I Have To Do' revealed a sexually provocative Minogue, the video for 'Shocked' pushed this persona even further, with added elements of sexual voyeurism and hints of lesbian desire on the part of Minogue.

Visually, 'Shocked' sees Minogue cast in various outfits, from man's suit (complete with high heels), cotton hot pants to a pink tutu. In terms of narrative and mise-en-scene, 'Shocked' plays with voyeurism, as her female chauffeur observes Minogue's trysts with men. Yet, the video ends with a point of sexual

suspense and suggestiveness, as Minogue is driven away from a man, the video ends with Minogue and the chauffer gazing at each via the car's rear-view mirror. However, while 'Sex Kylie' would see Minogue attempt to abandon 'Cute Kylie,' a playful sense of 'cuteness' remains. At one level, this is inscribed into the music. Although a variation on the pop sound of 'I Should Be So Lucky,' the soundtrack to 'Sex Kylie' was still the music of SAW. Moreover, Kylie herself gives visual cues that the sexuality of this phase is intrinsically playful. For instance, the pouting kiss that concludes the 'Step Back In Time' video breaks down into a giggle, a signifier of game play and of the slippage of a performative 'mask.' So, although seen (by some commentators) as a conscious emulation of Madonna, Minogue's antics, while certainly raunchier and more suggestive than her 'Charlene' phase, were not as visually dramatic as Madonna's 'Justify My Love' or S&M-inspired 'Erotica' videos. Consequently, although the emphasis was now on a more sexualized Minogue, cuteness nevertheless remained. However, what 'Sex Kylie' would mark was the end of Minogue's association with SAW and the beginning of a new 'identity' that represented both a decisive image and sound development.

### Dance Kylie

The emphasis on sexuality continued with Minogue's first post-SAW album for the smaller independent dance-oriented record label Deconstruction. The eponymous *Kylie Minogue* consolidated Minogue's search for a more mature sound and image, and so 'Sex Kylie' became 'Dance Kylie.' This direction was typified by the string-laden, dance-based single 'Confide in Me' and particularly its accompanying video.

'Confide in Me' presented six images of Minogue framed within the conceit of a televised 'sex lines', with a garishly made-up Minogue singing to the screen as '1-555- confide' telephone numbers repeatedly appear on screen. Although built on a dance beat, the lyrics and video also suggested an unprecedented sense of darkness, a feature visually suggested with the scenes in which Minogue stands before a mural consisting of drug capsules and pills. Here, a very different, post-SAW Minogue was being represented. However, a further video from this album was 'Put Yourself in My Place,' which was playful and an overt exercise in the social 'practice of mimicry' (Butler 138) as the video was framed as a 'homage' to Jane Fonda's zero-gravity striptease from the kitsch-classic sci-fi film, *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim, 1968). Within 'Put Yourself in My Place' the emphasis is firmly upon lightness, with Minogue dressed in garish colours and wearing fiery red hair, the effect completed with a distinctly psychedelic spacecraft with voyeuristic astronauts keen to witness the bodily display, but who are ultimately frustrated by window shields being lowered. Minogue's (modest) disrobing is purely for her own amusement. Hence, with an emphasis on her physicality, 'Put Yourself in My Place' provided a playful counterpoint to the overt sexuality of 'Confide in Me' (although the final shot of the decidedly phallic rocket heading into a circular nebula casts an interesting symbolic nod to 'Sex Kylie').

In addition to the sound and image aspects of *Kylie Minogue*, 'Dance Kylie' also marked her emergence as a 'gay diva,' with Kylie's famed public appearance at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parties,



a status she has retained, particularly due to her embrace of a disco-sound (Bonner, 2005). Minogue would develop this direction later in her career, however, as 'Dance Kylie' became established, Minogue would make an image detour, a development that was established through a (unlikely) duet with a fellow Australian performer.

### **Gothic Kylie**

'Gothic Kylie' was achieved in 1995 by way of a stark musical collaboration with Nick Cave, an artist once reputedly excluded from leading music magazines because he 'promoted evil' (Baddeley 2007) for the track 'Where the Wild Roses Grow,' drawn from Cave's *Murder Ballads* album, which reached # 2 in the Australian singles chart. 'Where the Wild Roses Grow' represented a dramatic and ostensibly unlikely synergy between two very dissimilar Australian musical figures.

The essence of 'Gothic Kylie' was established within the song's accompanying video in that the opening shot of the video depicts Minogue as the corpse of Eliza Day, a woman who has been brutally murdered with a rock by Cave. The song and video work to create a potent collision between Minogue's softly sung vocals and Cave's doom-laden intonations. Moreover, the video is highly sexualized, from Minogue's near-naked body and the suggestiveness of the snake which slowly glides across her thighs as she lies half-submerged within a river in a pose analogous to Millais' painting of the drowned Ophelia (Baker and Minogue). However, it is the relationship and visual interaction between Cave and Minogue that marks the performance as unique and radical in relation to her previous performances. Whereas the 'Sex Kylie' of the early 1990s flirted with voyeuristic sexual elements, the gaze within 'Where the Wild Roses Grow' is located within the zone of the taboo, that of necrophilia. Within 'Where the Wild Roses Grow' Cave engages in this process, re-visiting the corpse of Eliza day-by-day, declaring his love for her, and sensuously touching her body. The 'Where the Wild Roses Grow' collaboration (she also sang on Cave's 'Death Is Not The End') dramatically subverted and played upon Minogue's well-established 'Pop Princess' persona and its aura of cuteness in an unprecedented manner, a process Minogue would continue with on her next album by effectively jettisoning her pop sound altogether.

### **Indie Kylie**

'Indie Kylie' revolved around Minogue's 1997 recording: *Impossible Princess*, a title subsequently changed (although not in Australia) to the eponymous *Kylie Minogue* in the wake of the accidental death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The album presented a very different image in its active retreat from the glamorous aspects of 'Sex Kylie,' replacing it with a pared-down vision of Minogue, emphasizing a simple sense of style, lack of overt make-up, and a short, elfin-style hairstyle. Moreover, the musical style of the album was a major departure from SAW and her first dance-orientated work with Deconstruction. The 'indie'

aspect derived mainly from the writing contribution of James Dean Bradfield from the politically-charged rock group The Manic Street Preachers on the tracks ‘Some Kind of Bliss’ and ‘I Don’t Need Anyone,’ both characterized by a distinctive guitar-driven musicality. However, this was juxtaposed by a series of non-rock songs co-written by Minogue, such as ‘Too Far,’ ‘Breathe’ and ‘Limbo,’ which emphasized a minimalist musical structure, marked by stream-of-consciousness lyrics peppered with autobiographical insights which betrayed a range of musical influences from Patti Smith, Alanis Morissette and Shirley Manson, to Saint Etienne and Bjork (Sheridan); not a roster readily identifiable with the typical Kylie Minogue sound, and indicative of the album’s reception.

The *Impossible Princess* phase represented a period of diminished commercial success. It marked a moment in which Minogue consciously began to engage in a playful awareness of image construction and self-referentiality, acknowledging her distinctive ‘personas’ up to that point. This was unmistakably manifest within Pedro Romany’s video for ‘Did It Again’ which featured four Kylies, each defined by the labels that the media had created for her and in which ‘Kylie was split into the various splinters of her pop star persona. Dance Kylie, Cute Kylie, Sex Kylie and Indie Kylie all struggled [rather violently] for supremacy as they battled bitchily with each other for attention’ (Baker and Minogue 112-113). The overall victor however, was none of these incarnations, but rather the construction of an entirely new one. Because, although Minogue was now reflexively alluding to her identity-shedding progression, ‘Indie Kylie’ did not gel with the wider record buying public, and, to return to Caillois, this mask did not convincingly fit. As Caillois states of the incessant reinvention of mimicry, it is dependent upon a simple rule, that of the actor fascinating the spectator while avoiding an error that might lead spectators to break the spell (23). The emphasis on psychological revelation was that error. Hence, ‘Dance Kylie,’ while different (and in places, darker) than the archetypal ‘Cute Kylie,’ still maintained a recognizable connection, a sense of pop abandonment and playfulness. Consequently, ‘Indie Kylie’ was discarded for ‘Camp Kylie,’ a new persona, but one with discernible allusions to both ‘Sex Kylie’ and ‘Dance Kylie.’

## Camp Kylie

In 2000, Kylie Minogue entered her third decade as a pop performer, and regained the commercial success of her earlier career. Leaving the deConstruction label, she signed with Parlophone. Her ‘comeback’ was inaugurated with the single, ‘Spinning Around,’ which went to #1 in the UK charts. The single was soon followed by *Light Years*, an album dominated by an explicitly camp property, that principle which, according to Susan Sontag, chiefly involves ‘a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics...a vision of the world in terms of style’ (279) and which is especially centred upon ‘actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis’ and ‘apolitical frivolity’ (Robertson 3). Furthermore, for Sontag, the camp sensibility seeks the theatricalization of experience. Indeed, ‘the whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious’ (288). Unlike the prevailing motif of ‘Indie Kylie,’ with its moments of soul-searching angst, all of the attributes of camp described by Sontag pervaded the *Light Years* album, especially the video for ‘Spinning Around,’ because, as Sontag maintains, ‘camp taste is above all, a mode

of enjoyment' (291).

'Spinning Around' represented a decisive return to a pop music sound following the 'indie' experimentation of *Impossible Princess*. Within the video, the emphasis is firmly upon dance, fun and freedom. The setting is a disco and the video communicates no message other than to dance and enjoy life. Within 'Spinning Around,' Minogue's body dominates the frame, dressed, at some stages, in the now-iconic gold lamé hot pants. Minogue had of course sported hot pants previously, within 'Better The Devil You Know,' 'Step Back In Time,' and 'Confide In Me,' but this particular garment effectively led to a media obsession with her bottom, so much so that commentators in respectable broadsheets such as the *Sunday Times* proclaimed it as a 'wonder of nature' (Smith 190). The video for 'Spinning Around' presents a camp fantasy world, neon lit and slow-motion dance shots and a sense of unreality created by costume changes and marked by the easy-to-copy dance moves which could be re-created within real discos. The entire *Light Years* album, with writing contributions from Robbie Williams and Guy Chambers, similarly resonated with this camp sheen, from the mimetic plays upon 1960s 'bubblegum' pop as evidenced by 'Koochachoo,' to the dance-themed 'Disco Down' and the ultra-camp anthem 'Your Disco Needs You.' But, while maintaining the emphasis on a pop music sound that dominated *Light Years*, Minogue would don yet another performative mask for her next recording, an album which would see her evolve from camp disco-diva to a sleek, metallic 'simulacra' as she glided from 'Camp Kylie' into 'Cyber-Kylie.'

## Cyber-Kylie

Although there were three years between *Impossible Princess* and *Light Years*, it would take only one year for her next album, *Fever*, to appear. Moreover, the first single from the album, 'Can't Get You Out of My Head,' further established Minogue's cultural and commercial relevance in the new millennium, giving her the highest-selling #1 single of her career since 'I Should Be So Lucky.' 'Can't Get You Out of My Head,' with its hypnotic 'la la la' refrain and the deceptively uncomplicated, catchily-repetitive beats and synth-sound, marked yet another clearly-defined image transformation from the camp-infused *Light Years* to an emphasis upon a cool, machine-like sexuality, a trait clearly identifiable within the promotional video for 'Can't Get You Out of My Head.' As Railton and Watson state:

The video opens with Kylie Minogue sitting at the wheel of a car, driving into a futuristic metropolis typified by both the clinical environment of the city and the clean lines of its skyline. Indeed, both the evident architectonic space and the sheer brilliance of the image itself characteristic of this opening sequence typify the form and content of the video generally...all of the locations featured...are architectural in the sense that they are artificial, manufactured, built environments (59).

This sense of artifice and simulation extends to the human bodies within the video. The dancers flanking Minogue all wear 'robotic' outfits, their faces obscured by red plastic helmets. This artificiality extends

to Minogue's body and movements because in the instances 'when Minogue's body does move it is notable that her flesh does not. This is both made apparent and made possible, in part, by the design of her costume [which] variously constrain the flesh, cover the flesh, or reveal evidence of armature beneath the flesh' (Railton and Watson 60). This would be extended within the tour for *Fever*, with Minogue cast as the *Metropolis/Star Trek*-inspired 'Kyborg Queen.'

For William Baker, the overt 'electro futurism' of the musical style of 'Can't get You Out of My Head' firmly and explicitly established the direction and tone of the *Fever* period as: 'slick, minimalist and postmodern' (247). While Railton and Watson infer a Baudrillardian essence, Baker casts postmodernism in a general sense, and, although multifarious in form, and by its very nature problematic to define, the concept of postmodernism that Baker surely refers to is the sense that it is a body of knowledge, a set of philosophical approaches that foreground cultural and conceptual 'play and combination' (Harvey 1989); that, as Rojek outlines, replaces the 'heaviness of modernity' with a lightness of being. It recognizes play, change and anomaly as the province of humankind. It urges us to live without guilt' (cited in Rogers 146). If any contemporary pop performer's music invites us to do this, then it is (with the possible exception of 'Indie Kylie') the music of Kylie Minogue.

### **Incessant Pop Progression, or Kylie Minogue and the Sorcerer's Mask**

For William Baker, Kylie Minogue's career is one of flux. A figure who has vacillated between being 'revered and reviled, loved and loathed, adored and abhorred. Hers is a career of contradiction, of constant evolution, of construction and deconstruction' (Minogue, Baker et.al. 1). What is significant about Minogue is that this construction and deconstruction would become a conscious postmodern process. Moreover, this idea of a deliberately designed postmodernism would be implicit within the design and themes of the tour for the *Fever* album, *KylieFever2002*. Under Baker's direction, *KylieFever2002* would prove to be an exuberant exercise in spectacle, pastiche, mimicry, retrospection and the ironic, highly postmodernist references to both pop cultural artifacts and the celebration of the various 'ages of Kylie Minogue.' But this discussion is for another essay.

Returning to her post *Fever* recording career, Kylie Minogue has continued to toy with and adapt her image. For instance, the release of the 2003 album *Body Language* saw the creation of 'Bardot Kylie,' in which, on the album cover Kylie adopts the image of French actress Bridget Bardot's archetypal 'sex-goddess' image of 'long bleached blonde hair, heavy eye make-up, pink lipstick' (Vincendeau 82). Furthermore, for her 2005 world tour – a retrospective tour – Minogue adopted the guise of the 'Showgirl,' a new incarnation and a potential 'eighth age,' but one that represented a distinctive degree of self-referentiality in terms of image inspiration. Although the Art Deco inspired stage show divided Minogue into a series of discrete Showgirl incarnations (Las Vegas Showgirl, Follies Showgirl, Space Age Showgirl, Torch Singer), *Showgirl* also saw the distinctive return of 'Camp Kylie,' for if the 'hallmark of camp is...a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers' (Sontag 283) then the *Showgirl* tour,

with Minogue emerging from beneath the stage and resplendent in a feather-festooned dress and headdress (perhaps with less than three million, but an abundance of feathers nonetheless) would have made Sontag proud.

Following a hiatus from music and performing while she was treated for breast cancer, Minogue resumed her Showgirl tour and, in 2007, released her tenth studio album, appropriately named *X*. However, *X* did not suggest a distinctive image or theme. Bar the first single, '2 Hearts,' which bore a light 70s Glam Rock feel (with a hint of Goldfrapp), the album was generally an exercise in pop, with stylistic nods to her 'Dance Kylie' phase with regards to sound, and the videos for 'Wow' and 'In My Arms' suggested a further presence of self-referentiality, with the presence of semi-robotic dancers and vivid, garish dress complete with 1980s-style Dayglo colours. Indeed, the most striking aspect of the '2 Hearts' video and the *X* inner sleeve photography is Minogue's blonde hairstyle that evokes, ironically but arguably deliberately, Madonna within her 'Vogue' and *True Blue* periods (furthermore, Minogue performed a version of 'Vogue' as part of her 2006 *Showgirl Homecoming Tour*). And away from music, it is significant to note that Minogue adopted a further role, Astrid Peth in the BBC's 2007 *Doctor Who* Christmas Special, 'Voyage of the Damned;' a factor that producer Russell T. Davies believed would have 'gay men in Utah' who had never seen *Doctor Who* avidly watching for the iconic Kylie (Sheridan 250).

Thus, Minogue continues to engage in the artful process of performative mask wearing, articulating and according with Caillois' mode of mimicry in videos, photographic imagery and live performance. And if, as many commentators maintain, this process represents the epitome of constructed identity (Robertson), then Kylie Minogue is, if not the Queen (Madonna still arguably possesses that crown), the Princess of contemporary pop masquerade.

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# Swoosh time: Nike's Art of Speed advertizing campaign and the Blogosphere.

By Anna Notaro

*O, most wicked speed, to post  
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
(Hamlet, I, ii)*

*The reality of time has been replaced by the advertisement of time.  
(G. Debord)*

The 'problem of time' is conjectured to "become to the twenty-first century what fossil fuels and precious metals were to previous epochs" (Shaw & Weibel 562). This paper, while sharing such a conviction, focuses on what I define as the 'dromology of consumption'<sup>1</sup> by discussing Nike's Art of Speed ad campaign. In May 2004 Gawker media designed a blog micro-site for Nike to promote the project, which consisted of a short film series showing 15 digital artists' interpretation of the concept of speed. Web logs (better known as blogs) are beginning to surface as part of the marketing landscape and the campaign represented an interesting new approach to blog advertising. This paper discusses the impact of the contemporary culture of acceleration on the phenomenon of Internet branding, and engages with the interaction of commercialism and art in the context of today's new media practices. The short films produced by the 15 digital artists who were commissioned to create their own visions of speed through a "Nike lens" (to quote from the Gawker blog) are contrasted with the discourse of speed developed by the Australian artist David Noonan. In Noonan's videos, speed has been voided of competition or a useful end. These are never ending races, infinite loops without a winner, in which speed becomes almost hypnotic, to the point where it reaches its limit: inertia.



## Swoosh Time

Nike is most famous for ‘The Swoosh,’<sup>2</sup> the term given to the symbol that appears on Nike products. The design of the swoosh logo was inspired by the wing of the Greek goddess Nike. An important aspect of identification is the name associated with the product: Nike is the personification of victory — a goddess that can run and fly at great speed — Nike’s corporate identity revolves around the concepts of victory, success and speed.<sup>3</sup> As if it were a living organism, Nike has appropriated the same conception of speed, making it part of its own genetic code, its own history or genealogy.<sup>4</sup> This is apparent if we consider the ‘NikeGenealogy’ web site (‘Nike’ in red in the original. The two words are fused to stress their symbolic connection).<sup>5</sup>

Before entering the site we are invited to turn off any pop up blocking software, in order “to enjoy the fastest possible experience”. Once inside, we are presented with “The History of Speed” — á la Nike, of course — and with the following short text in a rapid sequence:

Speed is our Obsession

These are the Stories that make us who we are

This is our family history

This is our GenealogyofSpeed (words fused in the original)

This text is soon followed by the image of a rather atypical genealogical tree made up of Nike’s shoes, from Geoff Hollister’s Steeplechase shoe of 1972 to the ‘Zoom Monsterfly’ shoe of 2004 (the web site, produced in the run up to the 2004 Olympic Games, has not been updated since). Admittedly, Nike has always been clever in its advertising campaigns at blending themes of personal empowerment and transcendence with media irreverence.<sup>6</sup> The Genealogy of Speed is only one of several web sites produced by the company in the attempt to use the Internet for brand communication or ‘brand imprinting’, i.e. implanting in the consumer’s memory a brand ‘node’ that links a variety of associations - brand name, brand characteristics, advertisements about the brand etc. In this case, the sort of associations the site is meant to foster are: the global corporation Nike has ‘human’ characteristics, making it similar to any other living being, Speed is in its DNA (in an interesting amalgam of genetic terminology and software language code, the script ‘loading Genome’ flashes in front of our eyes before the image of the genealogical tree appears). In addition, Nike is just like one big family (designers’ names often appear next to the shoes they produced) and workers and customers are its members.

In the end, Nike has not only commodified sport, as it is often claimed, but has also branded a crucial temporal dimension of contemporary society: Speed. Time has become ‘Swoosh Time’.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, one could argue that Nike’s marketing strategies, as exemplified in The Genealogy of Speed web site and the Art of Speed campaign discussed below, epitomize what I call a ‘dromology of consumption’, i.e. the

bringing together of the logic of speed that is the foundation of technological society (Virilio 1997, 22-34) with global capitalism and cultural commodification.<sup>8</sup> For the time being it suffices to say that although Nike often presents itself as a ‘family’ business of sorts, this image clashes with the reality of its status as a “transcendent super-brand”. As Naomi Klein argues in *No Logo*, many companies in the mid-nineties took branding “to the next level: no longer simply branding their own products, but the outside culture as well” (28). For companies such as Nike, Klein claims, “branding was about thirstily soaking up cultural ideas and iconography that their brands could reflect by projecting these ideas and images back on the culture as ‘extensions’ of their brands, Culture ... would add value to their brands” (29).<sup>9</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The Age of Access* (2000), describes a similar process. In his book, as well as in several interviews, Rifkin has made the controversial claim that the days of the property-based capitalist economy are numbered. He notes that companies such as Nike own little more than a concept, a lifestyle; hence in the future we will be purchasing experiences rather than things, so much so that this form of exchange will seep into every area of our lives. In other words, “We are commodified. We’re moving from commodifying goods and services to commodifying culture”. (in Borger 2000). Nike CEO, Phil Knight, seems to endorse Rifkin’s views when he acknowledges that rather than manufacturing shoes or clothes “The most important thing we do is market the product” (Knight & Willigan 92).

According to Rifkin, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century time itself will be similarly commodified, together with all our “experiences, and even fantasies”.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, for the purpose of this paper, Rifkin goes on to argue in the above quoted interview that: “The big struggle is going to be between culture and commerce in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. For Naomi Klein such a struggle began in the mid-nineties with the appearance of the transcendent super-brand, “as more and more companies seek to be the one overarching brand under which we consume [and] make art” (130). The next section will show how the new digital technologies have the potential to take this threat to the next level.

### **Making Art in a Hyper-commercial Age**

Undoubtedly, the relationship between culture and commerce was contested in nature well before the 21<sup>st</sup> century began. The role of art in the context of the emerging practices of advertising was discussed in the following terms in 1924 by the architectural critic Sir Lawrence Weaver:

It is quite commonly felt ... that it is rather an oddity, even a disrespectable oddity, that the artist should give of his best to commerce. But I am persuaded that there is no greater hope for the correction of some evil aspects of the industrial revolution than *the whole-hearted devotion of art to the service alike of manufacture and salesmanship; and this in the interest both of artist and business man....* The *Times* has said that *advertisement has been elevated to something approaching the dignity of a fine art.* I look to the time when the arts of display will have achieved a more positive character. They will not approach; they will have arrived... Nothing will stimulate them more than the employment in the exhibitions, and in all forms of

publicity of the future, of the finest minds and hands that the artists of the world can bring to the task. So best can everyone, manufacturer, merchant, publicity expert, and the great public itself, prove that *the artist is not the servant of the few or the creator of the single precious thing, but the alchemist who brings at least seemliness and at best distinction to commerce, and touches to persuasive beauty the thousand things of the common life. (emphasis mine)*<sup>11</sup>

This is not the place to trace the history of the permeable border between artistic and commercial practices<sup>12</sup>, however it is significant that after many years the sort of Cartesian split Weaver describes between fine and commercial arts is not yet resolved, notwithstanding the fact that contemporary digital technologies often make such a distinction harder to draw. Here is what the critic David Thompson has to say in 2004:

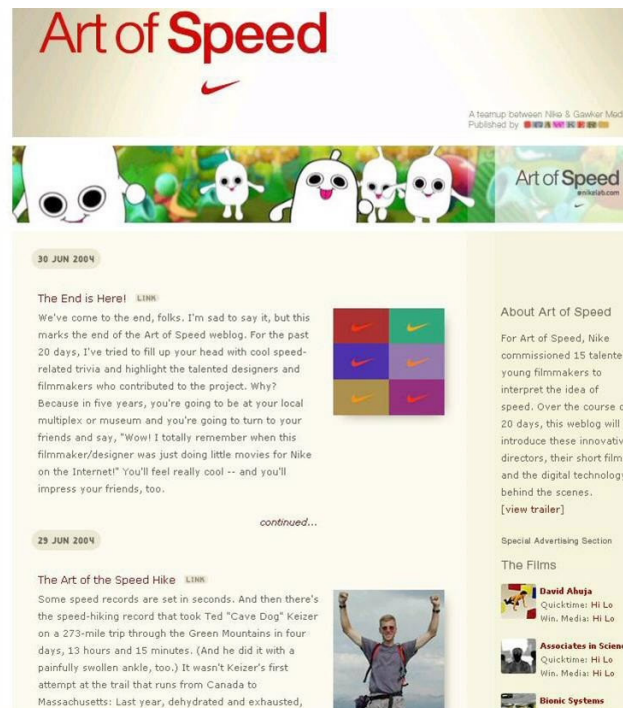
...fine art is faced with a very real problem presented by a rapidly evolving technological world, which means, in effect, a rapidly changing commercial world. What actually distinguishes “fine” art from the advertising techniques that it parodies and appropriates? As a result of this uncomfortable proximity, the modern art establishment seems gripped by the institutional equivalent of existential angst. As the tools of artistic endeavor converge with everyday commercial paraphernalia, most obviously in the realms of digital imagery, video and installation, a whiff of paranoia is becoming difficult to ignore. The proximity of “high” and “low” culture, in methodology and consumption, has apparently driven many artists to make great efforts to ensure no one confuses their work with mere commercial pleasure... The aversion to being associated with the commercial world, except as an ironic commentary, could be viewed as a kind of “credibility anxiety”, a fear among many artists that, should their work be stripped of its artistic context, very little would remain.<sup>13</sup>

Artists have used computers to make art since such machines have been around and it is interesting that one of the sites that functions as an archive for some of their productions uses the category ‘fine arts’ in conjunction with the word computer<sup>14</sup>. The Internet in particular has proven to be an exciting tool for artists, filmmakers, graphic designers etc., promoting collective forms of authorship<sup>15</sup> and interactive engagement with the public. Today, however, the question is whether the cyberspace imaginary will become a highly monitored and regionalized social space or whether the Internet will retain its radical potential for independent endeavors and ideological exchange. With these opposing scenarios in mind, the political implications of the Internet as a social network, and the role of media in general, present rich issues for creative and critical cultural production. Since the late 1990s, Weblogs, or ‘blogs’ in particular have been at the forefront of creative and critical cultural production. They are a site of online communication that has sprung up in the margins around several forms of mainstream public discourses and professional communication practices. In this context, it is not surprising that, when Gawker Media designed the blog microsite for Nike to promote the company’s Art of Speed project for a month between May-June 2004 —such ephemerality is particularly appropriate when promoting speed — the initiative caused quite a stir among media analysts and bloggers alike.<sup>16</sup>

Marketers have been quick to recognize the potential of the Web as a word-of-mouth enabler ('viral marketing' is the preferred term)<sup>17</sup>, but their success in using it in this way has been mixed. In 2003 the corporation Dr Pepper/7Up attempted to recruit bloggers to launch its new product 'Raging Cow' but the attempt backfired.<sup>18</sup> The question of branding the so-called blogosphere — a term coined by William Quick (2001) to indicate the "intellectual cyberspace that bloggers occupy" — is a controversial one. According to one analyst, "The response to the Nike's sponsored blog has been extremely positive. As with anything on the Web, there are some purists who resist the notion of commercializing blogs — much the same way some people reacted to banner ads a few years ago — but it's steps like these that legitimize the medium and help ensure it's here to stay" (Park). It is also argued that "The fractious media environment and audiences growing resistance to marketing messaging are *forcing* marketers to look to any virgin territory they can in which to place their messages and catch our attention. What one appreciates about Nike's method is that they seek to be part of the flow experience rather than be an interruptive force" (Ibid. My emphasis). Most experts agree that "blogs are starting to find their way into the marketing landscape because everything that has the potential for being a public vehicle of communication can inevitably be part of that landscape" (Ibid). The fact is that blogs, in essence, are personal expressions that have nothing to do with commercial enterprises<sup>19</sup>, as a consequence:

To let companies co-opt that is to undermine the very power blogs have that are attracting marketers to them in the first place. Savvy marketers know this, so they start their own blogs, as is the case for Art of Speed on Gawker. But there is nothing very authentic (or special) about a marketer putting up a Web site in support of a product, which is essentially all this is (Ibid.).

For Nike, as well as for other big companies that have linked their brand names to 'arty' products on the web<sup>20</sup>, "the blog experiment is only a drop in a marketing ocean, a narrow-cast tactic being employed to engage a quality audience, not a certain quantity of audience" (Oser). In the end, the fact that Nike is not going to see a massive increase in revenue is not important. What matters is the fact that they are going to generate some "good feelings and low-level buzz" (Ives). The Art of Speed blog did exactly that, with its cool, speed related trivia and, above all, with the film series showing 15 digital artists' interpretation of the concept of speed. Although the blog had no direct advertising for Nike, it did have a banner ad linking to Nike's main web site ([www.nike.com](http://www.nike.com)) and the swoosh symbol appeared prominently. The site was so 'cool' that, as one reads in the last posting, it was visited every day by "several hundreds of bored Adidas employees". The mix of young talent, digital film-making and blogging was irresistible even for the competition!



Gawker Media blog site for Nike (reproduced with permission)

Before being launched on the Gawker's blog,<sup>21</sup> the Art of Speed project first appeared on Nike's own web site, where we have a reiteration of some familiar themes already discussed with reference to the Genealogy of Speed site: the 'obsession' with speed, the image of the 'humanized' super-brand, which has come a long way from its legendary humble origins in a garage laboratory to the contemporary virtual Lab (the Nike main web is also known as Nike lab, <http://www.nike.com/nikelab/>). Once again economics and culture are presented as intertwined. In the following brief statement regarding Nike's design philosophy — *The perpetual development of lighter, more flexible and resilient materials. The sculpting out of extraneous components. The shaving of hundreds of seconds. This is the Art of Speed. And it culminates in the Nike Mayfly (the featured product)* — we notice an increasing emphasis on "artsy" metaphors and terminology (i.e. the 'sculpting out'). This is a design philosophy which is uncannily akin to Michelangelo's philosophy of "sculpting out extraneous components" in order to liberate the ideal form hidden inside a piece of marble. In Nike's case the aim is "the shaving out of hundreds of seconds". Speed, it would seem, is the measure of all progress for Nike, the most democratic of brands. Speed has become art and, as often is the case with art, it also imitates nature. This is exactly what the Mayfly shoe, the featured product on the web site, does. Such a shoe, just like the insect from which its name is derived, is so light that has only an ephemeral existence, the time/space of a marathon (a classical reference which is well in keeping with Nike's sporting ethos).<sup>22</sup> As Celia Lury (1999) acutely points out, the durability of the product is independent of the durability of the brand. It is also worth noting that the featured product, the commodity itself, is *literally* an artistic creation: when we click on 'launch the exhibition', the Mayfly quickly appears out of the videos that make up the Art of Speed exhibition.<sup>23</sup>

As for the 15 digital artists involved in the project, they are as diverse as their results suggest, combining

multi-media backgrounds in filmmaking, graphic design and architecture, among other disciplines. Still, they have something in common with each other, and with Nike, of course: “A desire to innovate and a willingness to push – and even cross – the boundaries of their craft”. I will omit here a discussion of the aesthetic merits of the 15 works presented. Overall, they are both an exploration and a celebration of what speed means to the human experience. Significantly, Nike having appropriated Speed and made it part of its DNA, human experience itself is (in)corporated into the ‘transcendent super-brand’ sphere of influence, in a new ‘dromology of consumption’. The risk is that “we become collectively convinced not that corporations are hitching a ride on our cultural ...activities, but that creativity...would be impossible without their generosity” (Klein, 35). Not surprisingly, the digital artists involved in the Art of Speed fall short of mentioning such preoccupations in the interviews released in connection with the launch of the project. One of such artists, Saiman Chow — co-author with Han Lee of ‘Oggo’, an eye-popping animation of adrenaline cells, named ‘oggo’, each outdoing each other in a race that shows how speed is ruthless and relentless — talks enthusiastically of his Nike commission experience. In his words, he was never told “you have to sell this!” Instead he was given a theme — in his case Speed and the related ones ‘Rush and Repetition’ and left alone to work on them freely. Nike was “super open” to his ideas and once he presented them with his project, they simply said, in pure Nike self-empowering style, “Great, do it!”<sup>24</sup> Chow seems to walk on thin ice or, worse, to suffer from selective amnesia, when he seems to distance himself from commercial artists working in advertising — whose commission would state in clear terms “you have to sell this!” He ‘forgets’ that Nike is not sponsoring his creative efforts ‘for the sake of it’, but to sell shoes (admittedly, not in as massive quantities as other ad campaigns using different media aim at doing). ‘Oggo’ is a standout piece in the Art of Speed project. It presents an amazingly rich animation style, using a massive collection of images and illustrations that sew together a visual story comprised of iconic social, cultural and historical references. One cannot help wondering, though, whether the landscapes created — all comprised of shoes and shoe parts, some even featuring recognizable models like the ‘Zoom Miler’ shoe – would have been imagined any differently, were Nike not the sponsor.<sup>25</sup>

But perhaps we are missing the point here. Maybe we should not be asking such questions and simply enjoy the visual feast of kinetic psychedelia that ‘Oggo’ presents. Or perhaps the exact opposite is true and questions still need to be asked because there might be lessons to be learned from the past. The debate about commercialism and the arts echoes the one about art and power that had art critics at loggerheads for years, blinding them, in some cases, to the aesthetic merits of artists such as the Italian Futurists (whose obsession for Speed is only matched by Nike). In other words, the (digital) avant-garde of today might be as subservient to the power of big corporations, as (some of) those in the 1920s-1930s were to the power of the totalitarian state.<sup>26</sup> In a short piece included in the catalogue of the exhibition Art and Power (Howard Gallery, London October/January 1996) David Elliott elaborates on the age-old question of the autonomy of art:

Like all ideals, complete artistic autonomy is impossible, but it is a symbol which should be cherished. For a free society, art is both a reflection of its complexity and an intimation of its capacity for change. As a result, modern art –almost by definition – has an incompatible or critical relationship with the culture in which it is made. In a politics of totalitarianism...it is

easy to overlook its value. But like a canary down a coalmine, its state...maybe an indicator of potential disaster. In the world of metaphor which art resolutely occupies, the health of the canary is of the greatest importance; the essence (and paradox) of the autonomy of modern art is that it should be valued not only for itself but also as a sign and guarantor of other freedoms – particularly when it turns to peck the hand that solicitously tries to feed it (35).

The short films that make up the Art of Speed project fall short of pecking the hand that feeds them. Even when they might appear to do so, as in ‘The Shortest Race’ by Jonathan Miliott and Cary Murnion, which flips the idea of an athletic event on its head with a ‘race’ of just one stride, precisely 39.9 inches, from start to finish, the films don’t engage in the sort of subversion that would get Nike worried.<sup>27</sup>

This whole debate, which is only briefly sketched here, is all about lines that should not be crossed ‘for art’s sake’ or for the sake of ‘other freedoms’ — to quote from Elliott’s point above — and yet, as Peter Lunenfelds reminds us, that is exactly what artists do: *they cross lines*. His reasoning, tinged with personal frustration, is worth quoting at length:

I’m regularly misunderstood on this point. It’s not that art and commerce are the same thing, just that all art exists in relation to the economic activity of its era. After Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, it’s impossible to speak of lines between art and commerce that ‘shouldn’t be crossed,’ because, after all, that one of the things artists do -- cross lines. For thirty years or more, art historians and critics have been hashing this out, and it’s pretty hard to ignore this fairly obvious point when you talk about the complex intertwining of art, design and commerce in the realm of the digital. (Christopher)

As Laurent Jenny observed a generation ago, whenever new technological possibilities come into the hands of artists “there is a tendency for the various arts to blend into one another. This occurs not only stylistically and thematically but also technically. In other words, modernist inter-textuality explodes into a post-modernist inter-mediality”. (Qt. in Wood) What is important to stress is that the ‘blending’ of the various arts, as envisaged by Jenny thirty years ago, finds a contemporary parallel in Lunenfeld’s ‘obvious point’: i.e. the interweaving of “art, design and commerce in the realm of the digital”. In this light, I think that Weaver’s 1924 definition — quoted in the previous section — of the artist as “not the servant of the few or the creator of the single precious thing, but the alchemist who brings at least seemliness and at best distinction to commerce”, might still be of some use today. The fifteen artists selected for Nike’s Art of Speed ad campaign are the new ‘alchemists’ of the digital age. They faced a difficult challenge: how to become ‘Imagineers’, i.e. the producers of images for consumer culture, while salvaging art, creativity and freedom from the sameness of market commodification, thus avoiding, in Simmel’s words, being “swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism” (Qt. in Mathews). Unfortunately they were not entirely successful, since they were ultimately swallowed up by the ‘dromology of consumption’ mechanism outlined above. Nike, the most dromocratic of brands, the corporation with Speed in its DNA, commissioned these fifteen young talents to celebrate its own branding identity. Digital art became complicit in ‘selling’ us consumption as the only way to live, and in viewing consumer identities as the only way to be. The

next section will provide a rather different example of the artist as ‘imagineer’.

Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (and Time)  
Culture is moving into what I call a visual velocity.  
Sometimes I wake up and I think to myself that it  
Looks like it’s going to be a 60 mph day.  
(S. VanDerBreek)

While the fifteen artists of the ‘Art of Speed’ project framed their purpose within the easily recognizable armature of new media: interactivity, multimedia, and the inclusion of the sponsoring brand’s products in their work, David Noonan is the kind of artist whose predilections are toward more singular metaphysical problems. His work is not focused on evoking the discourse of advertising or marketing. Noonan’s career encompasses over fifteen years of experimentation, throughout which he has worked with a wide range of media and a variety of topics.<sup>28</sup> In 1994 with his video work ‘Unique Forms of Continuity in Space’, Noonan approached the subject of speed from a contemporary perspective, wherein the pace is set by the virtual world of digital reality. His obvious influence is Italian Futurism. However, as Huppertz argues, Noonan’s work seems “to be more of a critique of contemporary values than an homage to the art they created. Using videos and stills from fast-paced contemporary sports, Noonan closes in on the contemporary discourse of speed” (Huppertz).

Noonan’s ‘Unique Forms of Continuity in Space’ is named after Umberto Boccioni’s famous sculpture, which was produced in 1913, the same year that he also produced the painting ‘Dynamism of a Cyclist’. Boccioni’s ‘Unique Forms of Continuity in Space’ is a three-dimensional sculpture depicting a barely discernable human figure in motion, in the process of becoming something else. The figure bears an underlying resemblance to a classical work over 2,000 years old, the ‘Nike of Samothrace’.<sup>29</sup> There, however, speed is encoded in the flowing stone draperies that wash around, and in the wake of, the central figure of the work. In Boccioni’s sculpture, the body itself is reshaped, as if the new conditions of modernity were producing a new man.

Noonan’s four-minute video loop ‘Unique Forms of Continuity in Space’ reworks a typical Futurist theme — the human form depicted as an inextricable part of a machine dedicated to speed — by tracking a competition cyclist around a velodrome. As Huppertz puts it:

In Noonan’s videos, speed has been negativised or neutralised of competition or useful end. These are infinite races, loops of infinity without a winner. The Futurist project was the first attempt to subordinate the energy and intensity of the machine age to the reasonable mind, to arrest speed in two or three dimensions. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the limits of physicality have been reached, and are repeated in the negation of matter through speed. In Noonan’s videos, speed is hypnotic to the point where the cyclist appears to be barely moving. He reaches the ultimate limit of speed – inertia (Huppertz 1997).



Noonan's infinite race also focuses on the mechanistic movements of technological bodies in space.

The human body becomes part of a projectile, a machine of maximum efficiency and precision. Through training, discipline and control, the human body is 'improved'. With the streamlined continuity of body suits and helmets, human beings are not using machines as a tool but *becoming machines*. ...The human body is merely a functional unit in a speed machine dedicated to the economy of time (Ibid. My emphasis).

This is the aesthetics of the cyborg, a figure first defined by Haraway as "a cybernetic mechanism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149), which has become a familiar figure in many different incarnations in popular media.

The new economy of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is also addressed in another of Noonan's cycling videos, 'Omega Time' in which "mechanical timekeeping devices, with their complex cogs and tiny screws, become worn; they 'lose time'. Digital time promises to overcome the potential inaccuracies of the physical world by inching closer to the infinite present. This virtual world of ones and zeros is the latest attempt to master the physical world through technology" (Huppertz).

## Conclusions

This paper has discussed what I have defined as the new 'dromology of consumption' in the context of Nike's Art of Speed ad campaign, launched in May 2004 by Gawker media via a specifically produced blog micro-site. The Art of Speed ad campaign was the culmination of Nike's long-standing efforts to 'in-corporate' the concept of speed within its own 'corporate image'. The short films produced by the fifteen digital artists involved in the ad campaign have been considered not for their aesthetic merits, but in the light of contemporary practices of Internet branding, practices that have revived the age old discussion about commercialism and the autonomy of art. The essay has finally contrasted the above-mentioned artists' vision of speed through a 'Nike lens' with the discourse of speed by the Australian-born artist David Noonan. His reference to the Futurists is an ironic reminder of the dangerous continuities between the rhetoric of the earlier avant-garde and that of the new, digital artists. Such dangers arise when art and echnology conjure up images of a digital utopia wherein "the holy pursuit of speed through technology has become a common sense, value-free model of thought" (Huppertz). Noonan's work, exempt from the pressurizing language of advertising, invites us to slow down, so that we can ask the most urgent questions about the politics of technology, the role of new, inter-mediated artistic practices and finally the future of our increasingly mechanized bodies. What we need is a 'go slow' ad campaign; too bad Nike has run one already.<sup>30</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Virilio is the inventor of the term ‘dromology’ — from ‘Dromos’ the Greek word to race, meaning: the science (or logic) of speed. For Virilio the logic of speed is the foundation of technological society and is important when considering the structuring of society in relation to warfare and modern media. He notes that the speed at which something happens may change its essential nature. See his *Speed & Politics: An Essay on Dromology* New York: Semiotext(e), 1977 [1986],

<sup>2</sup> The Swoosh trademark was created in 1971, for a fee of USD 35, by Carolyn Davidson, a graphic design student. The evolution of Nike’s logo is emblematic of the logic of the sign economy. It “began as an arbitrary drawing which possessed no intrinsic meaning whatsoever, has grown to the point that it now expresses a philosophy, and is viewed as projecting a multidimensional personality”. (Goldmann & Papson 1998, 79).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that before it meant velocity the Old English ‘spede’ or ‘sped’ meant something more like success and prosperity.

<sup>4</sup> Nike’s Genealogy reflects the construction of a linear historical development and it is obviously diametrically opposed to Foucault’s subtle deconstruction of this concept as discussed in his “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1977). The article is available online at <http://www.thefoucauldian.co.uk/ngh.pdf>. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this paper for drawing my attention to this point.

<sup>5</sup> View at <http://www.nike.com/speed/genealogy/detect.html>

<sup>6</sup> On this point see Goldmann & Papson’s *Nike’s Culture* (1998) for a clever deconstructive analysis of the themes and structures of Nike’s advertising that outlines the contradictions between image and practice, and explores the logic of the sign economy.

<sup>7</sup> A parallel could be drawn between the branding of time by the Swiss watch company Swatch, see their ‘Swatch beat’ web site at [http://www.swatch.ch/fs\\_index.php?haupt=collections&unter=beat](http://www.swatch.ch/fs_index.php?haupt=collections&unter=beat) and Klein’s brief discussion of it in *No Logo*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> For an interesting discussion of the neglected dimension of the political economy of speed (dromoeconomics) which recognizes the centrality of speed in contemporary societies in conjunction with “relationships of power, of exploitation ... and the accelerating characteristics of the work and market places in global capitalism”, see Armitage and Graham, “Dromoeconomics: Towards a political economy of Speed” <http://www.philgraham.net/Dromo.pdf> p. 23 and John Tomlinson’s discussion of ‘Fast Capitalism’ in his *The Culture of Speed*. London: Sage 2007, pp.80-93. Also, consider the concept of ‘Critical dromology’ as defined by the performance artist and activist Ricardo Dominguez at the recent symposium ‘Trajectories of the Catastrophic’ dedicated to exploring the work of Paul Virilio (October 24-25 2008, San Francisco Art Institute). According to Dominguez, “By extracting the core ideas from the canon of Virilian thought and

mixing them with new modalities in art and performance, a new paradigm emerges- a radical dromology for our time”. <http://va-grad.ucsd.edu/~drupal/node/642>.

<sup>9</sup> Addressing the vast debate about consumer culture is beyond the scope of this essay. Still, it is worth mentioning that Zygmunt Bauman, in associating consumption with speed, also considers consumerism as extending beyond the mere act of consumption. Bauman identifies a ‘consumerist syndrome’: “a batch of variegated yet closely interconnected attitudes and strategies, cognitive dispositions, value judgments and ...explicit and tacit assumptions about the ways of the world and the ways of treading it”. (Bauman 2005, 83. Quoted in Tomlinson 2007, 126)

<sup>10</sup> See the BBC “Back to the Future interview series” January 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/special\\_report/1999/12/99/back\\_to\\_the\\_future/jeremy\\_rifkin.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/special_report/1999/12/99/back_to_the_future/jeremy_rifkin.stm).

<sup>11</sup> Sir Lawrence Weaver, “Art in Advertising” in *The Advertising Yearbook for 1924*, John Clyde Oswald ed., Doubleday, Page and Company for The Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, 1925, 428-429. <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~UG00/3on1/tobaccoads/adver.htm>

<sup>12</sup> On this point see Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light London*: Routledge 1988 and Michelle H Bogart, *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art* Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1997.

<sup>13</sup> David Thompson, “Death of the Gallery”, *The Guardian*, 15 April 2004 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,1192250,00.html>

<sup>14</sup> For the period 1995-2005 see <http://web.archive.org/web/20050405224929/http://www.computerfinearts.com/index2.html>

Also consider the Digital Art Museum, that archives works from 1956 to the present at <http://www.dam.org/artists/index.htm> and the article by J.A. Labadie, “The New Media Soup: Some thoughts on newer technologies and the visual arts” at [http://web.archive.org/web/20060630075022/http://www.moca.virtual.museum/jal1\\_02.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20060630075022/http://www.moca.virtual.museum/jal1_02.htm)

<sup>15</sup> I discuss this issue in my article “Technology in search of an artist: questions of auteur/authorship in contemporary cinema” *The Velvet Light Trap, Journal of Film and Television Studies*, issue, 57, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See, among others, Janis Mara, “Gawker Media, Nike Team for Blog Promotion” *ClickZ News* 4/6/04 <http://www.clickz.com/news/article.php/3363541>

Nat Ives, “Nike Tries a New Medium for Advertising: The Blog”, *New York Times* 7/6/04 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/07/business/media/07gawk.html?ex=1402027200&en=c11f337e8aa8c-d5a&ei=5007&partner=USERLAND>

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<sup>17</sup> Of note is the difference, according to some, between Viral marketing and guerrilla marketing, "Guerrilla marketing ambushes the viewer and grabs their attention when they least expect it. Viral marketing is advertising that you voluntarily pass around because it's cool, not necessarily because you want to help build publicity" . <http://weburbanist.com/2008/06/12/guerrilla-marketing-versus-viral-marketing/>. On the more general issue of the commercialization, or marketisation, of the media sector over the past ten years see Els De Bens ed. *Media Between Culture and Commerce*. Bristol: Intellect Books 2007.

<sup>18</sup> See Rob Walker, "Blogging for Milk", *Slate*, 14/4/03 <http://slate.msn.com/id/2081419>

<sup>19</sup> Although one might argue that, in some instances, by promoting the Self, blogs are similar to any other commercial enterprise.

<sup>20</sup> See the BMW sponsored short films produced for the Internet and now archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050209074032/www.bmwfilms.com/clap.asp?template=international&country=&film=>. See also the Audi viral marketing campaign, inclusive of a cool virtual reality game, archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20050828095934/http://www.jalopnik.com/cars/ads/promotions/is-missing-audi-a3-a-marketing-ploy-038028.php> and the Levi's sponsored Digital Arts Award at <http://www.levis.com/>. Following in the footsteps of the already mentioned Dr Pepper/7Up ill-fated blog venture, Levi's also appeared to be looking for bloggers to cast into a new ad spot titled "A Style for Every Story" <http://www.gawker.com/news/media/advertising/bad-idea-jeans-bloggers-as-models-032594.php>. In an arrangement believed to be a first for the book industry, it is worth mentioning Fay Weldon's Bulgari-themed book *The Bulgari Connection*, London: Flamingo, 2000.

<sup>21</sup> Now archived at <http://web.archive.org/web/20040610073307/http://www.gawker.com/artofspeed/>

<sup>22</sup> The mayfly is an aquatic insect that belongs to the order of Ephemeroptera (from the Greek *ephemeros*

= “short-lived”, *pteron* = “wing”, referring to the short life span of adults). From <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayflies>

<sup>23</sup> The relevant web page is no longer available, however it is interesting to note that as far the Design element is concerned, “The actual shoe and packaging is decorated with a collage of video stills taken from the Art of Speed clips. One of the more apparent bits on the shoes can be identified as Saiman Chow and Han Lee’s Oggo creatures.” <http://www.beinghunted.com/v40/features/2004/mayfly/>

<sup>24</sup> It is worth remembering that ‘Just do it’ is one of Nike’s most successful slogans, one of the reasons being that: “Nike provides a language of self-empowerment – no matter who you are, no matter what your physical, economic or social limitations”. Goldman & Papson, *Nike Culture*, 1998, 19. More on Chow’s ‘Oggo’ project and his Nike commission experience at [http://www.onedotzero.com/artofspeed/saiman\\_chow\\_interview.html#](http://www.onedotzero.com/artofspeed/saiman_chow_interview.html#)

<sup>25</sup> There is an interesting comparison to be drawn here with the role that advertising plays in the entertainment industry (film, television and, increasingly, video games) where plots and characters are often built around the products within them. As the media critic Marc Crispin Miller puts it: “This is no way to have a functioning culture in a democratic society. It’s a way that turns all the content of all the culture industries into [a] mere continuation of advertising”. “The Persuaders”, interview with Marc Crispin Miller, *Frontline*, 9/11/04 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/interviews/miller.html>. See also his Advertising: End of Story” in Marc Crispin Miller (ed.), *Seeing Through Movies*, New York: Pantheon, 1990.

<sup>26</sup> What we risk is a form of cultural totalitarianism. The current situation is assessed by Crispin Miller as follows: “So we’re moving away from advertising per se towards a more fundamental kind of pitch, which is what propaganda, generally speaking, always wants to do anyway. Advertising is just a commercial form of propaganda. What propaganda has always wanted to do is not simply to suffuse the atmosphere, but to become the atmosphere. It wants to become the air we breathe. It wants us not to be able to find a way outside of the world that it creates for us”. “The Persuaders”, interview with Marc Crispin Miller, *Frontline*, 9/11/04 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/interviews/miller.html>

<sup>27</sup> The question is, as the anonymous reviewer of this piece acutely observed, whether or not commodity, by absorbing all critique, makes any subversion impossible. Unfortunately, I have no solution to offer on this point, but to assess each case on its own merit.

<sup>28</sup> A profile of David Noonan with reproductions of the video works mentioned in this article is available at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery at [http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/29/David\\_Noonan/185/](http://www.roslynnoxley9.com.au/artists/29/David_Noonan/185/)

<sup>29</sup> For a picture of Boccioni’s Unique Forms of Continuity in Space see [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Unique\\_Forms\\_of\\_Continuity\\_in\\_Space,\\_1913\\_bronze\\_by\\_Umberto\\_Boccioni.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Unique_Forms_of_Continuity_in_Space,_1913_bronze_by_Umberto_Boccioni.jpg). For a picture of the Nike of Samothrace see <http://www.theoi.com/image/S29.2Nike.jpg>

<sup>30</sup> Significantly, Nike's first women's TV advertising campaign (February 1993) shot in artsy, black and white photographic style "constructed the appearance of soothing...spaces within a world that otherwise seems to be rushing past". Goldman & Papsen, 128. For an analysis of the significance of the various initiatives (from slow food to slow cities) that go under the name of 'slow movement' see the chapter on "Deceleration" in Tomlinson (2007, 146-160).



# Digital Divide 2.0 and the Digital Subaltern.

By Mike Kent

## Introduction

Initial awareness of issues relating to the digital divide were raised by the 1999 study *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide* from the Department of Commerce in the United States<sup>1</sup>. The development and perpetuation of a digital divide between the information ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ was framed as a problem of ‘access.’ In the context of the increasing online population, debates about social inequity have often been directed at technical barriers to access, the physical infrastructure, and economic impediments to the adoption of the medium by all members of society. However, like the Internet itself, the nature of this divide is changing and has evolved in the last decade. New theories of understanding and new strategies of intervention are required to overcome new barriers to access presented by digital divide 2.0. This paper seeks to inform this process by focusing on those currently excluded from access to the digital environment not so much by a lack of physical infrastructure but rather by forces related to cultural capital and consciousness. This group without a voice in discourses about access has become a new type of digital subaltern. However this digital subaltern has qualities unique to the digital environment that they do not share with their analogue counterparts.

## Internet Access

When an individual accesses the Internet, they do so alone. While they might be sharing content over the network with others, the actual interface with the screen occurs alone, even if it is in a room full of other people accessing the Internet, such as at an Internet cafe. In order for access to occur a number of elements need to be present. The most obvious of these is the physical hardware of the computer and network. This hardware is enabled by the software that allows it to operate. While these two elements – hardware and software – are important, the third element – wetware – also plays a pivotal role. Wetware is a term less widely deployed than hardware or software. We can trace its relatively recent origins back to science fiction and cyberpunk literature.<sup>2</sup> Wetware represents the knowledge and experience held in the brain of an individual accessing the Internet, their ability to operate the computer interface at the screen and their literacy in the digital environment on the screen. Unlike hardware and software, wetware manifests as

an analogue rather than a digital platform. Visual content from the screen and audio from speakers are interpreted through the eyes and ears of the user.

These three elements form a matrix of access. All three need to be present for any individual point of access to work, and the relative strength of each of these elements will then determine the strength or utility of the access at that point. Each element can potentially compensate for weaknesses in the other two. Powerful computers can run poorly designed software, good software can provide a user interface to aid weak wetware, and a highly proficient user can make better use of their equipment. While all three can act to support the other elements of access, there is also a threshold at which access is no longer available, a point at which the screen (assuming one is present), rather than acting as an avenue for access, will instead become a barrier.

This atomised user at the screen exists in a wider social context, both online and in their immediate physical and social environment, and this also plays an important role in the value of access and its availability. In order to develop a fuller understanding of Internet access, the on and off screen positioning of the potential user must be monitored. This requires the development and evaluation of a fourth element of access – culture-ware or ‘cultware’<sup>3</sup> – the context of access in relation to the rest of society.

Unlike the other three components of access, ‘cultware’ is a commodity that is hard to define<sup>4</sup> and evaluate. Bourdieu in ‘The Forms of Capital’ touched on the concept of ‘cultware’ when outlining his development of cultural and social capital. Bourdieu was critical of traditional economics as being too focused on economic capital – the capital that is most easily converted into tender. He argued that a wider understanding of economic practice required an investigation that encompassed more than just a mercantile concentration. This narrow understanding that Bourdieu critiqued is often replicated in the analysis of Internet access, with the primary focus on hardware and software. Both comprise commodities that can be easily understood in terms of economic capital. Similarly wetware – knowledge and literacy – is an increasingly commodified entity with a cost to obtain and a value to be realised, particularly when related to communications technology.<sup>5</sup> ‘Cultware’ comprises an equal, if not more important, field of understanding within the digital environment, which is often overlooked for want of an appropriate label for the discussion. ‘Cultware’ describes the social capital that might enable a person to ‘borrow’ literacy through someone who can help him or her gain access and solve hardware and software problems. It also measures the networks of contacts that add to the value of online communications.

Early interventions into the digital divide emerged in the context of a rapid expansion of Internet access following the development of the World Wide Web in the mid 1990s. The focus was on providing physical access to the network. More recently these concerns have focused on the provision of broadband Internet access and have followed a similar philosophy.<sup>6</sup> However as Internet penetration begins to plateau in developed markets, new barriers to access are becoming apparent amongst groups who do not currently have access to the Internet, and who have no expectation that they ever will have access to the network.

## The Changing Digital Divide

There is a spectrum of Internet access. Research from the Pew Internet and American Life Project<sup>7</sup> demonstrated that the 58% of Americans who had access in 2003 stretched from intermittent users through to those with access to broadband Internet at home. Similarly the 42% of those who did not have access fell into different categories. The study labelled approximately eight percent of the population ‘net evaders’, individuals who were aware of the Internet, those who had others translate the Internet directly for them by doing online research and communications on their behalf, and those who actively rejected the Internet and avoided all contact. A second group were labelled ‘net dropouts’, approximately 17% of the population. These individuals have been online, but had since fallen outside the realm of access, most often due to hardware problems, either with their computer or their service provider. A final group, labelled ‘truly unconnected’ had no direct or indirect contact with the net. Not only did they not have access, but they also did not associate with others who did have access. This group, consisting of nearly a quarter of the entire population (24%) represent the digital subaltern.

More recent figures for 2008 show that Internet penetration in the United States has grown to 73%,<sup>8</sup> however this unconnected group persists. A report by Oxford Internet Surveys found that in 2007, 29% of people in the United Kingdom have never used the Internet. This study showed that, of those that have never used the Internet, 73%, or a little over 21% of total population, had little or no intention of ever gaining access. Results from a 2005 study showed that the size of this group in the population has changed little despite the growth in the overall percentage of the population that has had access to the Internet.<sup>9</sup>

This excluded group is different to those previously targeted by government policy aimed at crossing the initial digital divide. While there will still be those who are impeded from accessing the technology through absent network hardware and software, this new group of the ‘truly unconnected’ need to be understood more in relation to both wetware and specific skills needed to interface with the Internet, and also in terms of ‘cultware’ – the social capital associated with the Internet. This group represents a new divide: digital divide 2.0. Like the development of Web 2.0, from which this new divide draws its name, it is hard to precisely describe its contours. It is linked to the information sharing, facilitation of social networks, and online participation and collaboration that in part define Web 2.0, but, rather than being defined by the presence of these characteristics, it is their absence, and the lack of connectivity and social networks, that define digital divide 2.0.

For this group, without consciousness of their exclusion, or a voice in discourses about access, is rendered in the parlance of Postcolonial Theory, subaltern. This digital subaltern has no online presence, and their condition is unmarked by skin colour, gender or clothing in the analogue world. This type of invisibility makes any kind of intervention particularly problematic. They do not share space with others.

## The Subaltern

Within Postcolonial Studies, the subaltern has become synonymous with any marginalised or disempowered group, particularly with regard to race and ethnicity. For Spivak in her pivotal essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, the subaltern represented ‘subsistence farmers, unorganised peasant labour, the tribal and communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside.’<sup>10</sup> Spivak used the funeral ritual of *sati*, during which a widow would jump or was placed into the burning funeral pyre of her husband, and the banning of the practice in India by the British colonial administration from 1829, to illustrate the subaltern agency of these women. Local indigenous men protested the new laws, claiming it violated the rights of the women concerned to show their fealty to their departed husbands. Spivak characterized this conflict as ‘white men saving brown women from brown men.’<sup>11</sup>

Gramsci originally used the ‘subaltern’ to refer to class, specifically the subordinate class in southern Italy.<sup>12</sup> For Gramsci the construction of the subaltern was intimately linked to economic relations and class-consciousness.<sup>13</sup> The development of the consciousness of the subaltern and their understanding of their position and solidarity with others in a similar position was central to Gramsci’s intellectual project. Spivak, through the use of Derrida, then added gender, race and colonialism to the understanding of the subaltern.<sup>14</sup>

Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of “women” seems most problematic in this context. Clearly if you are poor, black, and female you get it three ways.<sup>15</sup>

As Spivak’s essay illustrates, no one can ultimately question the women who have actually burned on the pyre. For Spivak, commenting on the context of colonial production, there is no place in which the subaltern can speak. This understanding of the place in which the disadvantaged are given voice becomes a central focus of Subaltern Studies. In Spivak’s later essays, the understanding of the subaltern grows to include a variety of disadvantaged groups in the west including women and migrants. For Spivak, there is no space for the subaltern to speak and make their experiences and interests known from their own perspective. They are instead spoken for, largely by those who exploit them.

For Foucault, the subaltern was not authorised to talk in the ruling discourse, but rather engaged in many discourses of their own.<sup>16</sup> Homi Bhabha also describes the interaction between colonised and coloniser, noting that it is not always adversarial. He constructs a third space where mediation between the dominant and the subordinate occurs.<sup>17</sup> Both the coloniser and colonised share a physical space, if not the literacy and authority, through which it is possible to communicate. This understanding of a third space, a place where the subaltern can interface with the ruling discourse becomes highly problematised when appropriated into the digital environment, particularly in the context of an understanding of the screen, as the point of access, enabled by hardware and software, that can be traversed only through the literacy of the individual user.

Gramsci said that the path to empowering the subaltern, providing them with a place and authority to speak, required the development of class-consciousness, and specifically solidarity within the working class. In his specific context, this meant the construction of a common cause between industrial factory workers in the north of Italy and the peasant farmers of the south.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, Spivak provides no remedies for subaltern agency; she only describes the problem.<sup>19</sup>

R. J. C. Young articulated the potential for the construction of the subaltern to become a vehicle by which to overcome their relative disadvantage:

The concept of the subaltern ascribed a new dynamic political agency to those who had formerly been described as the wretched of the earth, the oppressed and the dispossessed. By means of the subaltern the oppressed assumed political agency to become the subject of history no longer its object.<sup>20</sup>

## The Intellectual

Antonio Gramsci in his writing developed the role of the intellectual as one who could represent the underclass and provide them with consciousness of their oppression. Gramsci theorised that in order for a new class-consciousness to enable the subaltern proletariat to take what he viewed as its predestined place as the dominant class in Italy, it needed to overcome existing divisions into different trades. Writing from prison, where he spent the last years of his life after being sentenced by the Mussolini-led Italian government, Gramsci wrote over three thousand pages in his notebooks, which were later smuggled out and published. He devoted an entire volume of these writings to the role of the intellectual. For Gramsci, intellectuals are leaders. As he explained, ‘all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.’<sup>21</sup> Gramsci postulated that there were two types of intellectuals, the traditional intellectual and the organic intellectual. Traditional intellectuals represent the academy, priests, and writers. While they might see themselves as autonomous to the ruling class, within Gramsci’s construction these intellectuals existed within and maintained the existing social order.

(E)very ‘essential’ social group which emerges into history out of the preceding economic structure, and as an expression of a development of this structure, has found (at least in all of history up to the present) categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms.<sup>22</sup>

This analysis follows Marx in asserting that the ideas of the dominant classes tend to be the dominant ideas.<sup>23</sup> Gramsci’s second type of intellectual, the organic intellectual, was seen as coming from within a class, and providing that class with consciousness and agency. The organic intellectual came from outside the existing social order to challenge its assumptions and power structures.

Spivak constructs the concept of the intellectual along similar lines. However she criticizes the attempts by western intellectuals to critique neo-colonialism and act on behalf of those most oppressed by the system for the failure of those intellectuals to take into account their own place within the existing system of oppression. Spivak specifically criticises Delueze and Foucault in this context. Moore-Gilbert notes that within this critique these intellectuals are:

assuming that they are transparent vis a vis the objects of their attention. In other words such ‘radicals’ too easily suppose that they are outside the general system of exploitation of the ‘third world’ – in which western modes of cultural analysis and representation (including ‘high’ theory itself) and institutions of knowledge (such as the universities in which such theory is characteristically developed) are in fact deeply implicated.<sup>24</sup>

By trying to provide a voice for the subaltern, these theorists are instead standing in their place, and representing or speaking on behalf of the subaltern themselves. They follow Gramsci’s understanding of the natural intellectual, while thinking that they are outside the existing social order, when they are in fact implicated in maintaining it. Spivak is also engaged in this process in the very act of describing its manifestation in others. While intellectuals may play a role in perpetuating the existing order, they are still best positioned to speak for the underclass.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately it is the role of the intellectual, following Gramsci, to provide a voice for, and consciousness of, the subaltern – this will be particularly true for the digital subaltern.

### **The Digital Subaltern**

The digital subaltern is made up of those without the ‘cultware’ needed to access the Internet. They are not seen from ‘on screen’ and they do not share a common space in which dialog can occur. They are trapped in a digital periphery where a digital centre cannot be experienced. Theories of colonisation and the analogue subaltern were modernising, grand narratives with big answers to big problems. The digital subaltern presents a post-modern strategy, fickle and fragmented; a person can be empowered in one way and disempowered in another, moving quietly and quickly move between those states. The digital subaltern is significantly different to its previous, analogue construction. However the potential to produce two separate strata of citizens remains.<sup>26</sup>

The digital subaltern like their analogue counterpart has no place in which to speak and no consciousness of their position. Unlike their analogue counterparts however they do not have any shared space where a potential dialogue with those in power is possible. With no shared space with those online, the digital subaltern has no ability to perceive what they are excluded from. Their inability to access the Internet obscures their view of that from which they are excluded, and at the same time inhibits society’s awareness of their exclusion. This results in an environment for the digital underclass where they are denied a voice, much like their off- screen counterparts (and obviously the overlap between these two groups will be not

insignificant). They are as invisible online as the Internet is to them while they face a screen without the literacy to activate its potential and without the ‘cultware’ that might enable it. The screen becomes like the funeral pyre for the *sati*, messages do not come from the other side to explain the subaltern’s experience in their own words.<sup>27</sup> They can only be spoken about and for by others online, and while they remain outside, this dialogue will occur without them.

The postcolonial theoretical construction of the subaltern recognises the fragmentation of class structure at the periphery, just as the broader area of study recognises the fragmented structure of the core. The digital subaltern represents an atomised and isolated underclass, no longer directly marked by social class, race or gender. These concepts are activated on the analogue side of the screen.

Foucault theorised the analogue subaltern as not having authority within the discourse of control, in which everyone speaks and which exists all around them.<sup>28</sup> For the digital subaltern this discourse takes place in a venue of which they have no experience. This greatly limits the potential for Bhabha’s third space in which translation can occur or common ground can be found; a place where this might occur exists only through the screen. The edge that separates core and periphery in the Internet enabled, digital environment is sharp and small.

Gramsci construed the south of Italy as having the status of exploited colonies – what Lenin characterised as Internal Colonies.<sup>29</sup> Gramsci pondered how to have the proletariat factory workers in the north of Italy share a common cause with the peasant farmers in the south in the context of a class struggle. Whereas the south of Italy represented a geographic region within the borders of the nation, those who are the subject of digital ‘colonisation’ are harder to group geographically. People access the Internet on their own as atomised individuals. Consequently, exclusion itself becomes an atomised experience. The digital subaltern is confronted with the barrier of the screen, they are without consciousness as a group, unknowingly united only by their ignorance of what they are missing. This creates a relatively clean, black and white line through the increasingly grey area of digital postcolonial relations within the borders of the Internet. This is the challenge presented by digital divide 2.0.

## Consciousness

Central to the construction of the subaltern both on and off screen is their lack of consciousness of their position. For Marx, the role of the party was to raise the consciousness of the workers. Those without political consciousness, the lumpen proletariat, had to be made aware of their exploitation and become politically aware as a precursor to a proletarian revolution.<sup>30</sup> This process, with all involved gathered together on the factory floor, seems relatively easy when compared to the process that Gramsci sought to initiate in raising consciousness amongst the geographically and socially dispersed peasantry of Southern Italy and their industrialised, potential class allies in the north.<sup>31</sup>

For the digital subaltern, attempts to raise consciousness are further complicated by their invisible presence both on and off screen. There is no one to act as a translator as is the case for the ‘net evaders’, or direct experience of the ‘net dropouts’. In order for any translation to occur, a way needs to be found to locate and communicate with this group, to translate from the digital environment, and facilitate the development of the matrix of access that will allow these excluded people the potential to access the Internet. The ‘truly unconnected’ have no experience of their exclusion, further complicating attempts to enable any consciousness of their position.

For Gramsci’s organic intellectual to be able to speak for the subaltern, to act as a translator, they must themselves possess the literacy necessary for access. Yet the digital environment changes the strategy for the intellectual as well. Translating for ‘cultural’ and literacy in the current, increasingly post-industrial environment requires different strategies than translating between geographic locations and classes in the industrial environment that confronted Marx and, later, Gramsci.

The digital subaltern needs to be provided with a voice in discourses of access, that is denied by their current circumstance. While for Gramsci the state represented an instrument of oppression, in relation to digital divide 2.0 the state can potentially act as a vehicle to alleviate disadvantage. As well as being spoken for, the digital subaltern needs to be spoken to, and there are problems with translation here as well. Those with highly developed ‘cultural’ and digital literacy do not necessarily have the skills to speak to this group in the language required to translate between the two. The digital subaltern may be most easily communicated to about the Internet by their peers – a digital version of the organic intellectual.

Until recently, the drive for Internet penetration focused on promoting the benefits of Internet access, and facilitating the provision of physical infrastructure, assuming, correctly, the existence of a large public body with the desire to be online. This group was predisposed to getting access, existing within sufficient bounds of ‘cultural’, literacy, economics, and with the potential to find useful content and the capacity to communicate online. This acceptance of the Internet required accessibility to fall within the economic and cultural parameters, and to have access to the infrastructure to provide carriage for, and interpretation of, the TCP-IP protocols. Strategies to encourage Internet take up have focused on these different areas.

However, growth in the penetration of the Internet has slowed as markets have ‘matured’ and the Internet has become ubiquitous throughout society.<sup>32</sup> The slowing of Internet growth indicates that those citizens with the predisposition for access, the latent ‘cultural’ to activate the Internet, have been or will soon be reached and included. Different countries will have distinct levels of a predisposed population for access, depending on their wealth, infrastructure and level of education. The borders of the Internet are becoming less porous with those left behind walking invisibly through the off-screen population as the digital subaltern. The concern with regard to Internet access must now move from a position of trying to encourage those who could have access but have not taken it up, to those who lack the ‘cultural’ to engage with the digitised environment, to overcoming the barriers of the emerging digital divide 2.0.



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> J. McConnaughey, D. W. Everette, T. Reynolds & W. Lader (eds), *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*. Washington: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Rudy Rucker's book with this title won the Philip K. Dick Award for best science fiction paperback in 1989.

R. Rucker *Wetware*. New York: Avon Books, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed examination of 'cultware' please see M. Kent "cultware": Constructing the matrix of Internet access', in T. Brabazon (ed) *The Revolution Will Not Be Downloaded: Dissent in the Digital Age*. Oxford: Chandos, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> P. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', translated by R. Nice, in J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

<sup>5</sup> The suit of commercial industry certifications from companies such as Microsoft, Apple and Cisco being examples of this commodification.

<sup>6</sup> In the 2008 Australian federal election one of the major points of contentions between the two major political parties was over providing broadband Internet access to rural and remote communities, and how

this could best be achieved.

<sup>7</sup> A. Lenhart, J. Horrigan, L. Rainie, K. Allen, A. Boyce, M. Madden & E. O'Grady, *The Ever Shifting Internet Population: A New Look at Internet Access and The Digital Divide*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> J. B. Horrigan *Home Broadband Adoption 2008*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet and American Life Project, July 2008. [http://pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_Broadband\\_2008.pdf](http://pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband_2008.pdf) [accessed 29.7.2008].

<sup>9</sup> In 2005 37% of the population had not used the Internet of which 63% had no intention of gaining access or 21.4% of the total population, in 2007 this group was relatively stable at 21.2% of the population, despite a 5% growth in overall Internet use over the same time period. W. Dutton & E. Helsper *The Internet in Britain 2007*. Oxford: Oxford Internet Institute, 2007. <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/microsites/oxis/publications.cfm> [accessed 30.7.08].

<sup>10</sup> G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988.

<sup>11</sup> G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988, p. 305.

<sup>12</sup> A. Gramsci, *The Southern Question*. Translated by P. Verdicchio, Berkley CA.: Bordighera Press, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> A. Gramsci, 'The Intellectuals', in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp. 3-23.

<sup>14</sup> S. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak', in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988, p. 294.

<sup>16</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*. Translated by R. Hurley, London: Allen Lane, 1978.

<sup>17</sup> B. Moore-Gilbert, 'Spivak and Bhabha', in H. Schwarz & S. Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 463.

<sup>18</sup> L. Marks, 'Antonio Gramsci', *The Marxist Quarterly*, October 1956, volume 3, number 4, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> B. Moore-Gilbert, 'Spivak and Bhabha', in H. Schwarz & S. Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial*

*Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 464.

<sup>20</sup> R. J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001, p. 355.

<sup>21</sup> Presumably women are incorporated into this determination as well.

A Gramsci, 'The Intellectuals', in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp. 3-23. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/editions/spn/problems/intellectuals.htm#nD> [accessed 29.6.2008].

<sup>22</sup> A. Gramsci, 'The Intellectuals', in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and edited by Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971, pp. 3-23. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/editions/spn/problems/intellectuals.htm#nD> [accessed 29.6.2008].

<sup>23</sup> Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> B. Moore-Gilbert, 'Spivak and Bhabha', in H. Schwarz & S. Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 453.

<sup>25</sup> B. Moore-Gilbert, 'Spivak and Bhabha', in H. Schwarz & S. Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000, p. 453.

<sup>26</sup> In the early days of the World Wide Web Kroker warned of a potential class division between the working class: 'ground in localised space', and the technocratic lass 'floating away in the virtual zone of hyperspace' A Kroker, 'Virtual Capitalism', in S. Aronowitz, B. Martinsons & M. Menser (eds), *Techno. Science and Cyber Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>27</sup> This is in no way meant to underestimate the horrific nature being burned alive.

<sup>28</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*. Translated by R. Hurley. London: Allen Lane 1978.

M. Foucault, 'My Body, This Paper, This Fire', *Oxford Literary Review*. 1979, volume 4 issue 1, pp. 9-28.

<sup>29</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'The Development of Capitalism in Russia: The Process of the Formation of a Home Market for Large Scale Industry', *Lenin Collected Works*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968.

<sup>30</sup> K. Marx K. & F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. Harmondsworth England: Penguin Books, 1967.

<sup>31</sup> A. Gramsci, *The Southern Question*. Translated by P. Verdicchio, Berkley CA.: Bordighera Press, 1995.

<sup>32</sup> M. Madden & L Rainie, *America's Online Pursuits: The Changing Picture of Who's Online and What They Do*. Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2003. <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/reports.asp?Report=106&Section=ReportLevel1&Field=Level1ID&ID=463> [accessed 29.6.2008].

# Allocation and Management of Resources for the Sustenance of Free Qualitative Secondary Education in Ondo State.

By F.O. Afolabi, L.M. Oyewusi and M.A Ajayi

## Background to the Study

Education constitutes the most formidable industry in Ondo State. Since the creation of the State on February 3, 1976, education has been attracting the largest proportion of the total money earmarked for social services. Of all the levels of education in Ondo State, secondary education has been consuming a sizeable proportion of the total money earmarked for education. The State Government has been bearing a heavy financial burden of secondary education with minimum contribution from individuals. This heavy financial burden borne by the State government had its genesis in the abolition of tuition fees in Nigerian public schools in September, 1976, all over the country as a result of the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (Adesina 1980) and complete take-over of all schools from various voluntary agencies by the Government.

Between 1979 and 1983 investment in secondary education in Ondo State took another dimension, when Governor Michael Adegunle Ajasin, under the now defunct Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) embarked on free secondary education program. During this period tuition fees, textbook fees, development fees and all special levies were abolished. The financial burden of the program was shouldered by the State Government, with little contribution from the household. Also, on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1992, Governor Bamidele Olumilua, under the now defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) inherited the heavy financial burden of secondary education as a result of free secondary education introduced by the party in Ondo State. Moreover, on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1999, the Civilian Administration in Ondo State led by Chief Adebayo Adefarati, under the Alliance for Democracy (AD) introduced a free qualitative education at all levels in the State. In Ondo State today, there is keen awareness that education is the greatest instrument that could be utilized for the solution of socio-economic problems and for the fullest realization of the potentialities and aspirations of the people. The present civilian administration in Ondo State perceives education as an investment in human capital, with the sole aim of wiping out ills such as ignorance, disease, malnutrition, unemployment, superstitious beliefs and practices, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, parochialism, political instability and economic

stagnation that usually plague an illiterate society. Hence the commitment of the State Government to the provision of free, qualitative secondary education in the State.

It is not superfluous to remark that to make secondary education free is a question of money, to make it universal and compulsory is a question of public support and law. But what we want today is secondary education that is relevant to the needs of the economy and society. Quality in education can be seen from various perspectives. For instance, the economists of education are always interested in assessing quality in education, by establishing the relationship between “input” and “output” in the education system, that is, the Rate of Returns or Cost- Benefit analysis of quality in education. Also, one may look at quality in education in terms of enrichment of the school curriculum, quality of teaching personnel, quality of school inspectors, quality of school equipment and facilities. However, quality in education may also be measured in term of relevance to the needs of the society. Igwe (1989) describes relevance as: “a question of functionality, fitness and appropriateness to the needs of daily life, the hopes and expectations for tomorrow and preparations for the uncertainties and challenges of the unknown future”. Based on this premise, qualitative secondary education in the context of this paper could be described as the extent to which the secondary education system is relevant to the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian society.

Of all the multifarious problems facing secondary school administration in Ondo State today, none is as persistent and as agonizing as the one relating to the allocation and management of the available resources in the schools. The free secondary education that inevitably paves the way to preponderant increases in secondary school enrolment has further compounded this problem. This problem has become so critical that it continues to echo in public debates, lectures, education seminars, conferences, workshops, and at the periodic meetings of All Nigeria Conference of Principals of Secondary Schools (ANCOPSS), Ondo State chapter. One of the most effective ways of sustaining free qualitative education is to supply the schools adequately with highly competent and well motivated teachers. According to Adesina (1980) “The heart of Nigeria’s educational system is the teacher. Whether at the primary, secondary or University level, the teacher is and would continue to be both the major indicator as well as the major determinant of quality education”. To further buttress the importance of teachers in educational matters, Aggarwal (1981) said that “the destiny of a nation is shaped in its classroom and it is the teacher who is very important in molding that destiny”. In the report of UNESCO on Twenty Years of Service to Peace, the teacher is described as the spark that fixed the whole development progress, the key man in the drive to progress. Fafunwa (1972) remarked that: “the service of the teachers are to a nation, for they more than any other professional group influence the lives of the Nigerian youths and therefore the nation’s future”. The following questions can be raised: How adequate are the secondary school teachers in Ondo State in terms of quality and quantity? How prepared are the teachers for the challenges of the new school curriculum? How competent are the teachers in handling these subjects? Are the teachers satisfied with their jobs? A school system endowed with sufficient, dedicated, motivated and innovative teachers is bound to maintain good quality of instruction given to its students.

The sustenance of free qualitative secondary education also depends largely on adequate provision of physical and material resources in the schools. Such physical facilities include spacious and well ventilated

classrooms, adequately equipped laboratories and technical workshops, well-stocked libraries, assembly halls, recreational ground, farm land, gymnasias, health centers, counseling rooms, staff offices and conveniently placed urinals and latrines. The material resources are made up of items of furniture, laboratory materials (consumable and non-consumable), motor vehicles, instructional tools, books and other stationery items as well as utilities such as electric power, gas and potable water in the schools. The pertinent question that imbues the mind at this juncture is: would the secondary schools in Ondo State be effective in performing their dual role of absorbing the quality primary school products and supplying quality entrants for tertiary institutions when they are starved with funds? This assumes that free qualitative secondary education can be effectively sustained if the schools are well funded. As succinctly put by Aghenta (1984), “the success of any secondary school depends upon the resources available to it. Money is very important in this respect because by it, all other vital elements in the school can be obtained such as buildings, purchase of equipment, payment of teachers’ salaries and allowances and running expenses”. Also, according to Ozigi (1978) “no organization can survive or carry its function effectively without adequate financial resources at its disposal. Money is needed to pay staff, maintain the plant and keep services going”. In his own contribution on the importance of funding the school system, Mussazi (1982) remarks that: “for schools to function effectively, they need sufficient money, money is needed to buy textbooks, establish new buildings, pay teachers’ salaries, buy science equipment and maintain other services that are required by a school to carry out its functions as an educational institutions”. This study is specifically set out to ascertain the extent to which human, physical, material and financial resources are being allocated and managed, towards the sustenance of free, qualitative secondary education in Ondo State.

## **The Problem**

The free secondary education in Ondo State has led to the rapid expansion of the secondary school system. It is no gainsaying that such rapid expansion of the school system will bring about high demand for more school buildings, more qualified and competent teachers and clerical staff and instructional facilities for effective teaching and learning in the schools. The specific research problem is to identify the various criteria for allocating resources to secondary schools in Ondo State and to ascertain the extent to which the available human, physical materials and financial resources are being prudently managed, with a view to offering some useful pieces of advice for improvement. In this respect, it is essential to investigate the extent to which secondary school administrators in Ondo State have been striving to achieve quality secondary education with the limited or scarce resources at their disposal particularly in a period of political and economic stress.

## **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are generated to guide the investigation:



H1: The teachers' gender is not significantly related to their perceptions of the criteria used in allocating resources to the schools.

H2: There is no significant difference in the school's location and teachers' responses on resource management in their schools.

### **Research Questions**

- (a) How adequate are the school physical facilities in terms of decency, space, ventilation and insulation from heat?
- (b) What are the other sources of school revenue, besides State Government grants, in a free secondary education system?
- (c) What staff development programs are organized for the teachers?

### **The Study Sample**

The study was carried out in five Local Government Areas in Ondo State. Six secondary schools were also selected through a sampling technique in each of the selected Local Government Areas. The respondents included the Principals, Vice-Principals, school registrars and other teachers with at least ten years teaching experience in the sample schools. Also, oral interviews were held with five officials of Ondo State Ministry of Education and two officials of Zonal Education Offices.

### **Research Instrument**

A research instrument titled: Resource Allocation and Management Questionnaire (R.A.M.Q.) was constructed to provide relevant information on the criteria for allocating resources to schools, adequacy of resources and the extent to which the available resources are being managed in the schools. The content validity of the instrument was determined through the assistance of some school administrators in the State. Its reliability was established through the split-half method. The correlation co-efficient of these half tests was calculated using the Pearson Product Moment Formula. The co-efficient obtained was further subjected to statistical analysis using Spearman Brown's formula. A co-efficient of 0.84 was obtained and the instrument was considered reliable.

## Data Analysis

A total of 450 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the subjects in the sample schools. The analysis was, however, based on 400 that is, 88.9% duly completed questionnaire.

## Results

Table I: T-test on Teachers' Gender and their Perception of Criteria for Allocating Resources to Ondo State Secondary Schools

Criteria for Resource Allocation	Male (N =166)		Female (N = 234)		Calculate d t-value	Critical t-value at P.0.05	Remarks
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
School enrolment	2.28	1.04	2.44	0.92	-1.59	1.960	Not Significant
Number of subjects offered in the school	2.36	0.91	2.30	0.94	0.55	1.960	Not Significant
Status of the school	2.42	0.94	2.45	0.95	-0.33	1.960	Not Significant
Critical Areas of need of the school	2.75	1.05	2.69	1.00	0.57	1.960	Not Significant

Table II: T-test on School Location and Teachers' Perception of Resource Management in their Schools

Resource Management	Urban (N = 166)		Rural (N = 102)		Calculated t-value	Critical t-value at P.0.05	Remarks
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Staff supervision	2.57	0.98	2.48	1.11	0.81	1.960	Not Significant
Staff development	2.31	0.86	2.22	0.83	0.002	1.960	Not Significant
Regular supervision of school plant	2.36	0.94	2.38	0.93	-0.21	1.960	Not Significant
Prudent Management of fund.	2.52	0.89	2.37	0.95	1.39	1.960	Not Significant

Table III: Responses on the Adequacy of Physical Facilities in the Schools in Political and Economic stress

Facilities	Very Adequate	%	Fairly Adequate	%	Inadequate	%	Not Available	%
Spacious and well ventilated classroom	106	26.5	26.5	66.3	29	7.3	0	0.0
Properly equipped library	0	0.0	120	30.0	280	70.0	0	0.0
Well equipped laboratory	124	31.0	42	10.5	23.4	58.5	0	0.0
Properly equipped Technical workshop	24	6.0	70	17.5	210	52.5	96	24.0

School halls	104	26.0	218	54.5	78	54.0	0	0.0
Students' common room for playing in-door games and relaxation.	0	0.0	84	21.0	41	10.3	275	68.8

Table IV: Responses on the Sources of School Revenue besides State Government Grants in a Free Secondary Education System

Source of School Revenue	Responses			
	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Parent-Teachers' Association contribution	62	15.5	338	84.5
School Harvest and Bazaar	265	66.3	135	33.8
Proceeds from school farms	210	52.5	190	47.5
Sales of Students handicrafts	116	29.0	284	71.0
Sporting Activities	275	68.8	125	31.2
Religious Organisations	106	26.5	294	73.5
Philanthropic Organisations	84	21.0	316	79.0
School Alumni Association	56	14.0	344	86.0
Staging of school plays	24	6.0	376	94.0
Influential community members	17	4.3	383	95.7

## Discussion of Findings

As clearly indicate in Table I, the calculated t-value for each criterion for allocating resources is lower than the critical t-value at P.0.05, with 398 (degree of freedom). Thus, there is no significant difference in the response of male and female teachers to the criteria for allocating resources to secondary schools. The null hypothesis '1' is therefore upheld. Taking a mean of above 2.50 as an index of a group's majority

agreement to a statement, it is obvious that most of the teachers held the view that school enrolment; number of subjects offered in the school, status of the schools, and critical areas of need of the school constitute the criteria for allocating resources to schools.

In Table 2, the calculated t-value for each resource management area is lower than the critical t-value at P.0.05, with 398 df. Thus, there is no significant difference in the responses of the teachers in urban and rural schools to the various resource management areas in the schools. The null hypothesis '2' is therefore upheld. Taking a mean of above 2.50 as an index of a group's majority agreement to a statement, it is quite obvious that most of the teachers held the view that staff supervision and development have been given high premium in the schools. Also, there is regular supervision of school plant, while the school fund is being prudently managed.

On the adequacy of the physical facilities, while 63.3% of the total respondents contended that spacious and well ventilated classrooms are fairly adequate in their schools, 7.3% held the contrary view (Table III). However, over 54% of the total respondents declared that properly equipped libraries, well equipped laboratories, properly equipped technical workshops and assembly halls were inadequate in their schools. Also, most of the schools lack a students' common room for playing in-door games and relaxation. Inadequate physical facilities in the schools can be attributed to the financial problems they face.

As indicated in Table 4, over 52% of the total respondents declared that their schools realized substantial revenue from school harvest and bazaar, sales of school farm products, and sporting activities during free education programs. While other sources of school revenue in a period of free secondary education such as Parent-Teachers' Association, sales of students' handicrafts, religious organizations, philanthropic organizations, school Alumni Associations, staging of school plays and contributions from influential community members have proven ineffective, with negative responses of over 70% (Table IV).

Realizing the importance of teachers in sustaining free, qualitative secondary education in Ondo State, the State Government has made a bold attempt in the last six months to recruit more teachers into the secondary schools in virtually all subjects. A survey of the teaching staff in the sample schools revealed that some subject areas are over-staffed, while teachers for subjects like Home Economics, Fine Arts, Technical Drawing, Business Studies, Typing, Shorthand, French, Hausa and Igbo are grossly inadequate. Student enrolment in these subjects is dwindling, particularly at the senior secondary school level. The State Government has been encouraging staff development programs for the secondary school teachers. Quite a large number of teachers with NCEs have obtained their Bachelor's degrees though the 'sandwich programs' of some Nigerian Universities. While some non-professional graduate teachers are either currently pursuing, or have already completed, their Postgraduate Diploma in Education under self- sponsorship.

However, teachers' participation in staff development programs like workshops, seminars, refresher courses and other programs, such as exchange teaching, professional writing, visits to other schools to observe teaching methods, and staff conferences on modern instructional strategies, have not been given prominent attention in the schools.

Although the school administrators have been supervising the school plant, buildings, materials and equipment to ascertain which schools require immediate and urgent repairs, a survey of the physical facilities in the schools revealed that most of the school buildings have depreciated greatly. According to Afolabi (1998), the depreciation of school buildings can be attributed to a number of factors, including wear and tear, physical decay, obsolescence, negligence in the use of the school plant, and defects in construction of the plant. Classrooms in most schools are without doors, shutters or louvers in their windows, and the floors are either peeled or dusty. Commenting on the problem of dilapidated school buildings, Awokoya (1981) said:

*The worst of our woes is the maintenance of school building. Millions of Naira can waste away if the schools are not properly maintained. The health of pupils can be in constant peril when the toilets are not hygienic and life itself is in danger when the walls are likely to fall. Ministries and Local Governments that fail to maintain their school buildings may unwittingly be sowing the seeds of sorrow among the public at large.*

Furthermore, Olutola (1981) maintained that “the untidy school compound, the unserviced equipment and the poorly maintained buildings do not depreciate fast, but they also cut a very poor image for the institution”. The school administrator must ensure that the school buildings are properly maintained and that the surroundings are clean and free from health and safety hazards. This can be effectively achieved through periodic and systematic inspection of schools to identify areas in need of repairs.

Water, like food, is one of the basic needs of life. In most rural schools, pipe borne water is virtually non-existent and in some urban schools supply of treated water is irregular. As the schools have no tanks for storing treated water for the students’ use, the students drink untreated water from streams and brooks, which exposes them to water borne diseases. According to Mallmann (1977) “water from lakes and streams become the water supply and sewage and industrial waste depositories of people living near them. When the sewage wastes contaminated the water supply, enteric disease resulted”. The lofty goal of free qualitative secondary education may be onerous if most of the beneficiaries (the students) could not attend schools regularly due to endemic disease contracted by drinking contaminated water in their schools.

In some of the secondary schools, “maintenance culture” has become a prominent feature of the school system, as evidenced in some of the vital equipment, instructional materials and library resources kept in proper condition in the schools. The procedure of maintenance is not properly followed if one waits until equipment or machinery breaks down before making the effort to get it working again. The most important approach, however, is to keep equipment and machinery in good working condition by regularly ensuring an optimal level of efficiency. It thus becomes imperative for the school administrators to evolve a proper schedule of regular maintenance for all items of equipment and machinery. Due to highly inadequate funding, the necessity of intensifying efforts in this direction can no longer be ignored. According to Oguntonade (1996), “regular servicing of vehicles, periodic renovation of buildings, polishing of furniture, regular lubrication of metal apparatus, checking of water taps and gas tubes as well as prompt washing of containers are only some examples of the strategy of maintenance without waiting

for total break down”.

## **Conclusion**

To match the exhilarating growth of the secondary school system with qualitative growth, it becomes necessary to find ways for the secondary school system to be run cost-effectively. Maintenance culture must be deeply rooted in the secondary schools. Special attention must be focused on prudent management of human, physical, material and financial resources, in order to sustain a free, qualitative secondary education in Ondo State.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Toward solving the financial problem of secondary schools particularly in a period of free secondary education, the need to embark on some fund-raising activities becomes inevitable. These activities include organizing school endowment funds, encouraging donations both in kind and in cash, offering consultancy services, engaging in commercial farming of poultry, fishing and catering services, and organising sports and games for which gate fees are charged. Companies, politicians, businesspeople, and the community at large must be enticed to assist in secondary school financing. The school funds must be judiciously expended, while wastage must be curtailed.

The teachers must be highly motivated and must be prepared to face the challenges posed by the economic recession. Teachers must be assigned appropriate classes. The staff development programs should be accorded prominent attention. Moreover, fringe benefits should be reviewed continually rather than tied to agitation, especially in those cases wherein such benefits are justified by economic and social pressures.

Since teacher efficiency could be greatly impaired by the inadequacy of instructional resources, secondary schools must be adequately equipped. The science laboratories, libraries, technical workshops and home economics rooms must be well equipped. To reduce cost, bulk purchases must be encouraged, while a central body should be selected to supply and equip all secondary schools so as to avoid variations in the standard of equipment. The physical facilities and equipment must be properly maintained, so as not to rapidly depreciate

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# Spirituality, Economics, and Education: A Dialogic Critique of “Spiritual Capital.”

By J. Gregory Keller and Rob Helfenbein

[T]he right has been able to take certain elements that many people hold dear and connect them with other issues in ways that might not often occur ‘naturally’ if these issues were less politicized. (Apple 2001, pp.220-221)

In the ultimate sense spiritual capital is the missing leg in the stool of economic development, which includes its better known relatives, social and human capital. (Malloch 2003, p.2)

The belief that the truth of a theory is the same as its productiveness is clearly unfounded. (Horkheimer & Adorno 1991, p. 244)

In 2005, the Spiritual Capital Research Program announced a \$3.75 million grant “to catalyze the emergence of a productive, vital and interdisciplinary research field of spiritual capital in the social sciences, with particular attention to building connections to economics” (Spiritual Capital Research Program 2005). This particular work, commissioned by the Metanexus Institute and the John Templeton Foundation is, as we argue in the following dialogue, an exemplar of neoliberal rhetoric taking aim at the economic uses of spirituality in a globalized world. Based in a conservative think tank with ties to the American Enterprise Institute and using such neoconservative thinkers as Francis Fukuyama, this project is, we contend, a veiled example of the “conservative restoration” at work (Apple 2000; 2001; Shudak & Helfenbein, 2005).

Traditionally, spirituality has functioned in three ways in everyday life. First, it has answered deep and often pressing questions concerning the meaning of human life, the suffering associated with loss and deprivation, and the fears and hopes connected with boundary situations such as birth and death. Second, it has legitimized existing power relations. Third, it has resisted those same power relations (see, for instance, Chopp 1986; Cobb 2000; Cobb 2002). The question we wish to address arises from the methodical and alarming co-opting of significant human values by the subtle rhetoric of a neoliberal/neoconservative agenda such that the resistance to hegemony historically available through spirituality is instead turned

into another form of acquiescence (Cobb 2002; Lakoff 2004; McCutcheon 2005).

We offer a moral critique of the co-option of one major aspect of cultural capital by an agenda that aspires to strengthen certain religious sub-cultures by showing their value in maintaining a “one-dimensional” (Marcuse 1991) economic and cultural system. Our approach relies upon, on the one hand, an idea of the social and political significance of moral thinking (Arendt 1971; Keller 2005) and, on the other hand, an analysis of some rhetorical devices employed by the Right that conflate freedom with the “free market” and represent their agenda as simple “common sense” (Shudak & Helfenbein, 2005). The authors, in explicit opposition to the ideology at work in this project on spiritual capital, present a response as a counter move in the hopes of articulating a broad tactic that is directed against the forces of cultural production employed by the Right.

This paper consists of a conversation between a philosopher specialising in ethics and religion and an educational researcher with an interest in cultural studies and contemporary social theory. Dialogic in form, this paper employs an interdisciplinary response to an interdisciplinary project and offers the following components:

- a dialogic theorizing of the implications for education of a research project on spiritual capital;
- a continuation of the project of analyzing moral thinking in various cultural and societal settings;
- a continuation of the project of analyzing political rhetoric (towards an understanding of the polemics of political rhetoric);
- a reaffirmation of the value of recognizing difference and ambiguity in the global moment.

Pairing spirituality with economics empowers a vision of education as a first line of defense against the alleged risks of allowing for diversity and critical questioning (Doerr 1998). Neoliberals/neoconservatives thus produce another rhetorical shift of meaning by which to reduce dissent and resistance to the level of an anti-patriotic, anti-religious, anti-value menace to the United States and its vision of global dominance (Lakoff 2004; McCutcheon 2005; Carter 1998). This dialogue represents an effort to present a counter-balance to that rhetoric. In pursuit of these goals, the authors have decided on four major themes and attendant questions that serve to frame the inquiry in the spiritual capital project of both philosophy and cultural studies. <sup>1</sup> The themes are:

1. Modernity: Two essential features of modernity lie in an attempt to gain “rational” control over all things and an attempt to “create its normativity out of itself” (Habermas, 1990). How does the notion of spiritual capital relate to these goals?
2. Utility: Can every aspect of life be appropriately subsumed under the mantle of usefulness? What takes us beyond usefulness?

3. Doubt: Doubt can be used as a tool for attaining certainty (Descartes) or for creating need (advertising or propaganda). In science/philosophy/spirituality doubt instead represents an attitude of accepting ambiguity and uncertainty (with an open mind; as prods to questioning). Can we stand questions and dialogue, rather than turning incessantly to answers and polemics?

4. Wonder: Wonder points to wonders – the unexplained as well as the inexplicable. How do we allow wonder to open avenues of escape (points of resistance) from under the crushing weight of Modernity, Utility, and Doubt?

**1. Modernity: Two essential features of modernity lie in an attempt to gain “rational” control over all things and an attempt to “create its normativity out of itself” (Habermas, 1990). How does the notion of spiritual capital relate to these goals?**

*In the beginning discussion of economic development, Malloch (2003) describes the “redemptive hopes and expectations” of efforts at global development and continues to describe development efforts as religious activity (p.7). Echoing notions of faithful stewardship familiar in Christian thought, the rhetoric of spiritual capital follows the missionary zeal of saving the people of the developing world from themselves.*

Economic development can be viewed as creative management of endowed resources by stewards who act on their faith commitments. Here, genuine economic growth is guided by normative laws, character, and principled habits and practices that take into account the preservation needs of human beings, their environments, and their physical, mental, social, cultural, and spiritual lives. In the ultimate sense, spiritual capital may be the third leg in the stool which includes its better known relatives, namely: human and spiritual capital. (Malloch, 2003, p.7)

*Certainly, in this example, one can see the attempt to “create its normativity out of itself” as the ‘norming’ function of spirituality is not only recognized but also praised. It is here that we argue that the project for conceptualizing spiritual capital falls into the arena of a broader struggle for modernity and note that what might be unique about these efforts is not their mere existence, but also their openness to public discourse. Further, we are operating under the assumption that the bar set for these analyses of spiritual capital—although likely to be denied—is a particular brand of American Protestantism as it stands to reason that the dominance of the United States in the new global economic order privileges its own spiritual characteristics. Again, the project works to create its normativity.*

John Cobb, Professor of Theology Emeritus at the Claremont School of Theology and well-known process theologian, critiques the collusion between Christianity and economics by pointing to the critical distance between the ideas and practices essential to the Christian spiritual tradition and the worldview and accompanying practices espoused by much of current economics (2000, 2002). First, he notes that academic understandings of the world typical of modernity rest on a particular metaphor: all systems within the

World, including human beings, function as purely mechanical objects (2002). Most of the great spiritual traditions, however, see the world primarily in organic rather than mechanical terms. From the outset, Cobb claims, it has been not only people operating within the conceptual structure of the physical sciences but also those within the social sciences, and even within the tradition of the humanities, who represent the world in mechanical terms. Thus the very structure of knowledge, and the political, personal, and cultural composition of everyday life that draws upon that knowledge, has no room for spirit except as it is smuggled in or assumed in a manner that ignores the dissonance between the mechanical and the spiritual.

A second critical point brought up by Cobb arises from his first point. The mechanical worldview, for all its conceptual fecundity, takes apart pieces of the world's inevitable complexity for the sake of analysis (2002). Such analysis can result in truly astonishing new perspectives concerning the nature of the physical, biological, and social entities roaming the world. The problem that hides at the heart of analysis unfolds as soon as we recognize a concomitant disconnection between part and whole. A friend of mine once tried to repair his car. When he was finished he had a box of parts left over, and the car wouldn't run. While in most cases an adept mechanic could put a car back together after disassembling it, we are, at least at present, far less able to put a living body back together and even less successful at restoring order to the emotional and spiritual aspects of a person.

A corollary problem to that of analysis lies in the particular emphasis placed on the results of that analysis. So, for example, economists frequently see money, wealth, or societal indices of wealth as the key to understanding the function of society (2002). Cobb makes the obvious point that Christian (and Buddhist) perspectives cannot agree with placing wealth at the center of social and political life. He says, "[W]e deeply, fundamentally, oppose placing the quest for wealth first" (2002). He says further that, from either the Christian or Buddhist perspective, "Justice, peace, and meeting the basic needs of all are much higher priorities than simply increasing overall wealth" (2002). But the problem of economic analysis lies deeper yet. Some contemporary economists have seen the grave difficulties posed by analysis simply in terms of wealth.<sup>2</sup> But one need not look to religious voices or to our contemporaries for an objection to putting wealth at the center of social concerns. Aristotle explained it quite simply by saying that wealth cannot be the highest aim of human life for the simple reason that wealth necessarily has secondary status; it is always sought for what one can then do with it.

The greatest difficulty with the economic outlook, according to Cobb, lies in its "particular view of human beings," which is "an abstraction from the fullness of human reality" (2002). He points to two particular parts of that abstraction. First, the standard economic view takes all rational human behavior to be strictly (and quite simple-mindedly) self-interested and, second, takes all human beings to be possessed of (or by) "insatiable wants" (2002).<sup>3</sup> At the very least these two claims ignore the breadth and depth of human interests on the one hand and set the scene for an industry oriented toward "creating unsatisfied wants" which fuel "an unsustainable system" (2002).

All of the previous points led to one over-riding set of claims: (1) "The only form of satisfaction that is recognized is that derived from the possession or consumption of desired goods and services" (2002),

(2) the value of anything or anyone “is the price that someone is prepared to pay for it [or them]”; i.e. all objects, events, processes, and people are seen as commodities (2002), and (3) concerning what Cobb calls *economism*, he says, “I think of it as the first truly successful world religion” (2000). He follows up that last point by saying why he passionately rejects economism as a viable world view. He believes that the economic growth at which it aims “does not improve the economic condition of real people” (2000); that even if major economic changes were to reduce the numbers of the “desperately poor,” the policies that strengthen economic growth “will destroy the natural basis for our life together long before they resolve the problem of poverty” (2000); and that “these economic considerations fail to deal with the real needs of people” (2000). “Policies,” he says, “designed to improve the real quality of life of human beings will prove very different from those designed to increase production and consumption overall” (2000).

Cobb’s overall point is reminiscent of H. Richard Niebuhr’s (1993) claim that we cannot do without faith, the question facing us is faith in what? The spiritual aspects of life need not be confined to the perspective of one religion, or to any traditionally religious perspective at all. The spiritual resides in our capacity for wonder, in resistance to the totalizing and dehumanizing effects of mechanistic and oppressive worldviews, in what Nishitani (1983) calls the “Great Doubt” – that which calls into question our certainties, our repressive and obsessive rationalities, our submersion in privilege and games of power, our claims to knowledge and to making objects out of all things. Spirituality, from this perspective, lies not in Truth but in questioning, not in conquest but in openness, and, finally, not in control but in letting go.

*Pushing an analysis of economism even further, it seems not far a field to characterize the conflation of economics with spirituality as another set of moves toward the creation of subjects to a larger regime of power. Connecting this to Cobb, to be seen as a commodity fundamentally changes the nature of what it means to be. And particularly since the current dominant political force in the United States – what Grossberg (2005) calls the New Conservative Alliance – represents the strange bedfellows of free market neoliberals and the current formation of the Religious Right, for those that might offer another perspective, understanding how such a conflation might operate seems increasingly imperative. Foucault (2003) suggests that the project of social analysis should be to “bring out...relations or operators of domination” (p.45) rather than studying power as some bounded subject or unitary force. It is here that the reader is reminded that those engaged in the project of studying spiritual capital as such neither represent such a unitary force, nor agree on the usefulness of the notion. However, as part of the attempt to understand the workings and cultural formations of late capitalism, the term begs the question, “what is at stake?”*

*To approach the stakes of this conceptualization, the intersections of these notions are critical. How then might the notion of spiritual capital work in the creation of subjects? How do normativity and subjectivity operate in this struggle for modernity? First, to follow Foucault (and later Giorgio Agamben) we turn to the question of sovereignty, since subjectification as a process lies in some legitimation of sovereign power. Sovereignty in this type of analysis includes three essential elements: 1) discussion of how subjects become subjects; 2) an assumption of the multiplicity of power that converges in all relations of power; and 3) how power is legitimated in something more basic than law (2003, pp.44-46). In the case of spiritual capital — and perhaps its most surprising attribute — the creation of subjects is explicit; they are just waiting to*

be born. Malloch (2003) offers “the concept is pregnant with possibilities drawing on the intersection of economics and religion...in the ultimate sense spiritual capital is the missing leg in the stool of economic development, which includes its better known relatives, social and human capital” (p.2). Fusing business rhetorical terminology and accepted management technique with a shallow reading of social theory, the notion of total human capital can be reduced to an equation (see Davenport 1999 cited in Malloch, p.4). While this tendency to reduce human behavior (and even value) to a quantifiable formula resonates in our earlier analysis of the context of shifting modernities, most striking is Malloch’s allusion to an even more mysterious variable in such machinations: the human connection to the work.

Not only is sovereignty in this case justified on the basic economic relations common in late capitalism but it is suggested that certain characteristics might tie workers to corporate operations ever more tightly, producing so-called comparative advantage (p.4). This connection of workers to work in the hopes of increasing productivity captures the language of spirituality in a discourse of “development...based on hope” (p.4), “development...[as] religious category” (p.7), and, most specifically, “the impact of religion on conduct and rules as employees and employers, consumers and producers; and citizens at every level of existence” (p.8). Recent social theorists have a term for such a precise descriptor: biopower (Foucault 2003; 1998; Hardt & Negri 2000, 2004). It is precisely the multiplicity of forces at work in this creation of subjects — economic, social, cultural and now, to be clear at least rhetorically, spiritual — that productivity and profit, and for the sake of our argument, biopower itself is to increase. This leads to the third aspect of sovereignty: legitimation.

For the sake of global capital, the argument for legitimacy hardly needs to be made. There is no question about the rhetoric of development itself. Fundamental questions regarding the nature of a globalized development effort (i.e. profits for whom?) and the larger question of what is at stake for those whose spiritual characteristics must be abandoned or adapted in order to capitalize on them remain out of bounds (an exception seems to be Berger & Hefner 2003; Woodberry 2003). So it is in this way that “what is at stake” in this conception of spiritual capital is yet another position in the struggle for modernity, utilizing the normative power of spiritual/religious institutions to foster development in ways neither questioned nor contradicted. Underlying all of this is the notion that spirituality serves a purpose beyond itself, it has use.

## **2. Utility: Can every aspect of life appropriately (usefully?) be subsumed under the mantle of usefulness? What takes us beyond usefulness?**

Our discussion of utility comes from the effort to characterize spirituality in the terms of capital, a language of exchange and use. Calling spiritual capital the “third leg in the stool” (Malloch, 2003) and citing Pierre Bourdieu as inspiration for defining this subset of social/cultural capital (Berger & Hefner, 2003; Finke, 2003; Iannaccone & Klick, 2003), those scholars involved in planning this line of research have tended to de-emphasize the theoretical implications of the concept of cultural capital and instead jump immediately to notions of use value (i.e. production and protection of capital, migration and transfer;

*and impact on organizational development and growth; see Finke 2003). Before offering a conception of spirituality as beyond usefulness, a quick detour through the theoretical context seems appropriate.*

*Bourdieu's importance to contemporary social theory is obvious, recognized (although mocked in Iannaccone & Klick 2003, p.3) by the scholars of spiritual capital. In reading the Outline of a Theory of Practice one sees connections to discourse theory, neo-Marxist analysis, and cultural studies ala Birmingham (2000). First thoughts on Bourdieu, remind me of the notion of people in a history not of their own making, making their own history. As a post-structuralist he resists a social formation in which force, or rules, dictate social practice but rather, suggests a theorized habitus that delimits the possibilities of action and production. In other words, habitus is "a system of dispositions—a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future" (Bourdieu 2000, p.82). But as these dispositions are not necessarily constant or inevitable, Bourdieu is interested in thinking about society as a "struggle of symbolic forces" (Madarasz, 2002). This habitus serves to set the guidelines for both the perception of objects and the production of practices (Bourdieu, 2000 p.118). Bourdieu's conception allows for both the social construction of meaning and the material improvisation of actors interacting with the social world. In this way, social practice, while restrained by the "schemes engendered by history," still holds no guarantees in terms of the cognitive or linguistic practice that ensues (p.82). The parallel here with audience theory, or what Stuart Hall (1992) might call 'encoding and decoding', forms an essential framework for cultural studies analysis. It is precisely the possibility for improvisation — the spaces opened up — which allows a theorization that includes an explicit politics. It is here that Bourdieu's theory is one of resistance, of revolutionary practice. It is here that Bourdieu would argue against intentionally bringing in spirituality to the realm of capital.*

*The habitus, as guidelines for both means of perception and practice, allows for an understanding of those actions in cultural practice that defy an economic logic. Theorists advocating a reproductive model of social hierarchy, especially in education, continually fall short of explaining the processes by which such limiting organizational structures and contradictory liberatory rhetoric can coexist. As an alternative, Bourdieu's description of the creation and social involvement in cultural capital provides both an understanding of seemingly non-economic behaviors and furthermore relates specifically to the impact of credentialism in modern society. In relation to schools, the cultural capital most valued and easily transferred into economic capital is notably absent from school curriculum. But perhaps most interestingly, Bourdieu suggests that the impact of cultural capital on social systems is one of distinguishing between individuals and positions. This form of objectification through credentials, which in modern society are transferred through educational institutions (but, in this case religious ones?), becomes reified into a false objectivity, another form of the misrecognized mechanics of the social (p.187). Could the efforts at cataloguing spiritual capital be a better example? To list the characteristics of forms of spirituality and place them in some taxonomy of economic benefit reduces them to economic variables. In this way, spiritual credentials translate into economic benefit in a seemingly neutral way. This misrecognition of the history and processes of perpetuation in the social interactions in turn forms the common sense conceptions that form the habitus of a new form of class-consciousness. The circle is complete; Bourdieu spins in his grave.*

*Bourdieu's commentary points out that the objectification that occurs in the move to credentialise leads to a misrecognition of inequity and even critique. Habitus then not only preserves the social hierarchy but also allows for those who benefit from it to enjoy the deception as social groups to lie to themselves, at every level. It follows that the efforts to categorize spirituality in terms of utility — as a form of capital — fit with and follow from Bourdieu's logic of the legitimation through which the shift from recognizing individual gain is occluded by the presentation of objective positions such as "development." In this way, as Bourdieu states,*

*Gentle, hidden exploitation is the form taken by man's exploitation of man [sic] whenever overt, brutal exploitation is impossible (Bourdieu, 2000, p.192)*

*Now then, what to do? This reading of Bourdieu is not a hopeless one. Although the description has been kept brief, the possibility for revolutionary practice and social change resides in this critique. It would seem then that the possibility for social change comes in the historicizing (recognizing?) of the processes of social hierarchy, or moving the doxa. In other words, challenging the habitus as much as possible in order to address the inequities of the system. I'm vaguely reminded of Laclau and Mouffe and the utilization of both the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence to challenge social practice, using the postmodern dispersion to form temporary alliances in pursuit of political good.*

From the impact of spiritual capital on the habitus and thus on the individual embedded in society, we turn to the effects of this idea on religion itself. "Religion must not be considered from the viewpoint of its *utility*, any more than life should" (Nishitani, 1983, p. 2). Keiji Nishitani, Buddhist philosopher of the Kyoto School, tells us that many aspects of everyday life offer themselves to us as items to be used. Religion, he suggests, comes to us in an altogether different guise. Nishitani uses the word "religion" here not to designate religions, but to designate the underlying experience that lies beneath the external formalities of religions. In keeping with Nishitani's concerns and with our current questions of spirituality and capital, the word "spirituality" will be substituted for his word "religion."

How, then, does spirituality confront us so that we may not put it to use but instead become "a question to ourselves" (Nishitani p. 3) through it? It strikes us in the moments when our certainties, our self-sufficient self-representations, and our entertainments drop away and we see before us the "abyss [that] is always just underfoot" (p. 3). But, in moments of reflection, we need not wait for "death, nihilism, or sin" (p. 3) to grab and shake us. We can, at any time, turn our eyes to what lies beneath, around, and in us all the time. "[The] fundamental conversion in life is occasioned by the opening up of the horizon of nihilism at the ground of life" (p. 3) – in short, spirituality in this sense lies in facing the faceless, nameless mystery upon which we stand and to which we answer.

As human beings we face the danger of being so bound by the "wisdom" of our own cultural achievements that we take religion or spirituality as simply another means to accomplish our goals. In the business of making and using things, we simply do not notice that certain fundamental realities of life do not present themselves for shaping or for use. We may, of course, use for our own ends the results and rituals of



religion; it is in fact a commonplace that religion gets used by individuals, by groups and governments, by the scrupulous and unscrupulous alike. Nishitani, however, points to an easy yet costly mistake we make in that process. We fail to realize that the core, experiential reality of religion can never be co-opted by us. The underlying mystery, the silence behind the words will not wait upon our purposes and will not become subject to our projects and strivings for control.

Nishitani quite simply points to the way that not only religion but also we we become objects of use. *Here again, our conversation turns to the notion of subjects. How “we ourselves become objects of use” aptly describes the process of subjectification. But perhaps more importantly, the conception that there is at least the possibility of something else—here described as the “Great Doubt”, or “the abyss underfoot” or even provocatively, “the underlying mystery”—points to such controversial terms in social theory as agency, resistance, and hope. Here we might point out that the dangers of economism already discussed lie not only on the political Right as vulgar Marxism suffers from the same tendency to reduce the sum of human interaction to the economic. The flaw in these types of analyses — even if it comes from political allies—resides in the failure to recognize the existence of these mysteries (i.e. agency, resistance, and hope). Further the great mystery of social critique may be that be in pushing the recognition of the Marxist maxim of people making their own history in conditions not of their own making into the more troubling arena of “yes, but how can it be so?” What might be said to be missing in either modernist critique is doubt.*

**3. Doubt: Doubt can be used as a tool for attaining certainty (Descartes) or for creating need (advertising or propaganda). In science/philosophy/spirituality, doubt instead represents an attitude of accepting ambiguity and uncertainty (with an open mind; as prods to questioning). Can we stand questions and dialogue rather than answers and polemics?**

The capacity for doubt might well be the most spiritual of our natural capabilities as human beings. Doubting our beliefs, our capacities, the potential for our hopes to be realized, the continuation of our own existence, and the structures and meanings assigned to objects and people by any given culture – this doubt provides us a glimpse of our finitude, of the genuine and valuable uncertainty that underlies our boastful dogmas. Philosophers and religious thinkers, mystics and religious practitioners find themselves drawn to dogmatic utterances meant to cover up the insistent voice of doubt. Yet doubt is not our enemy.

Descartes turned to doubt as a friend and advisor in his attempt to find a single point upon which to erect a monument of truth. The subsequent history of philosophy has, of course, shown his enthusiastic certainty to be misplaced. But many have admired and drawn upon his method. The method did not begin with him. Who can say which solitary thinker or which conversation between people in earnest pursuit of some truth first brought to light the deep and enduring value of questioning that which seems most obvious? The entire history of human thought owes its presence and its hopes to the method of doubt. Yet as a method it shows certain signs of fracture and wear that the more prominent thinkers often try to cover with a tapestry

here and a new paint job there. Its dangers lie not in doubt itself but in our play with it.

C. S. Peirce (1868) points out that that the Cartesian doubt that one brings in as a prop only to dispense with it moments later (revealing its use as a magician's rather than a logician's tool) weakens one's arguments.<sup>4</sup> Paolo Freire (1998) notes in his critical assessment of a banking education that the curiosity with which we begin to learn gets systematically frozen out by icy answers that do little to address the pulsating warmth of our genuine doubts. Freire then suggests the deep significance of developing what he terms "epistemological curiosity" as part of our individual development toward freedom.

Nishitani takes aim at a central problem in Cartesian doubt by saying that it remains too shallow, protecting answers already assumed rather than dredging the depths of our need to know, to control, to maintain our certainties that are pathetically uncertain despite our wishes otherwise. Spirituality begins from these hints and hopes to unfold the reasons we cannot put answers first, the reasons we cannot use spirituality to uphold our domains of power and surface control, the reasons we cannot place maintaining the status quo at the heart of any true form of spirituality.

The great doubt pointed to by Nishitani uncovers a fissure at the heart of human life and culture that no amount of plastering over can disguise. Spiritual need arises from the truth of uncertainty. Allegedly spiritual notions that remove ambiguity or that place the spiritual in the service of commerce will never ring true. They cannot because they must always hide from doubt, turn it into a marketing tool, or blame its presence on excessive materialism rather than on our humanity itself. But the hidden will always emerge from its exile, the tool will turn upon its maker, and the blame that falls so effortlessly from the rhetoricians lips will slip to reveal the self-inflated but ordinary human figure behind the curtain. Doubt cannot be eradicated as though it were some rootless weed. It is instead the ground, the rain, the sun, and the tender cultivator of the human condition.

*Doubt too is the ground in which this critique is rooted. Fundamentally, we contest the notions that the project of modernity leads to global development as stewardship or more incredibly, redemption. In this way we engage in the struggle for modernity. Agamben (1998) points to the biopolitical as the prime mover of modernity with a disturbing ultimate destination, the concentration camp. Far from redemption, this analysis of the modern project comes out of recognition of that relation between sovereignty and the creation of subjects. As cited earlier, sovereignty as a form of power is legitimated through forces beyond mere law (Foucault 2003). Sovereign power lies in the state of exception, or, that position of power that necessarily lies outside of the jurisdiction of law (i.e. the right to execute, the right of conquest, or in contemporary terms, executive or congressional privilege). Too many contemporary examples exist of the expanding domain of the state of exception to spend time detailing them here, but what remains important is the possibility for doubt in the critique of this horrifying path. Agamben however seems to presage the project of spiritual capital when he notes, "the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest" (Agamben, 1998, p.122).*

*The intimate symbiosis of the biopolitical indeed seems to point to the ultimate structure of control.*

[F]rom this perspective, the camp—as the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space (insofar as it is founded solely on the state of exception)—will appear as the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity, whose metamorphoses and disguises we will have to learn to recognize. (Agamben, 1998, p.123)

*But, if this process of modernity is inevitable, what good can then good come from recognizing “metamorphoses and disguises?” Could it be that even Agamben has doubt as to the outcomes of these complex forces? It would seem so and we, in the construction of this paper, came also to ask “why then are we not there?” in response to his mapping of the route to the concentration camp. Here we return again to the “Great Doubt” and the “underlying mystery” of how subjects find voice, struggle against structures that seek to define them, and come to wonder about how the world might be different — taken broadly, spiritual questions all.*

#### **4. Wonder: Wonder points to wonders – the unexplained as well as the inexplicable. How do we allow wonder to open avenues of escape (points of resistance) from under the crushing weight of Modernity, Utility, and Doubt?**

Socrates says that his mission from the gods revealed that no one was wiser than he because he alone seemed to be aware of the poverty of his knowledge. Plato echoes a similar recognition when he says that philosophy begins in wonder (1997). A. N. Whitehead concludes that philosophy not only begins but also ends in wonder (1968). Certainly we can say the same for spirituality. Any alleged spirituality that turns away from wonder to make of religion another tool for our use has failed to comprehend the deep need we have to recognize the inexplicable at the heart of the World.

We view the world and ourselves as object or subject under the aspect of control, from within the reign of certainty. We make “things” and “selves”; we are creators of a World with clearly delimited boundaries and clear-cut rules. Yet in controlling, reigning, making, creating we fall prey to the very power we wield. The “Modern” world of enlightened rationality ends, Agamben says, in the concentration camp, in the bare, merciless hand of sovereign biopower. The usefulness of things and persons points a skeletal finger toward emptiness when the uses of usefulness open before us – opening to means and purposes that must be named yet resist the naming. Doubt reminds us of all that we fail to know and of the failure of knowledge itself when within it the sovereignty of control and certainty is revealed. So in the end we find ourselves approaching wonder.

Yet how may we approach wonder, the ever-receding view of openness or emptiness (Nishitani, 1983) before which the mirage of control and sovereignty, of objects and subjects grows dim. Do we turn wonder into another means of control, another aspect of power relations through which we “master” the unknown?

Or do we escape from “grand narratives” only to ground our lives in and even revel in a new reign of naked power that escapes the chains of reason only to be bound by the chains of unconsciousness? Certainly philosophy and spirituality begin in wonder and, most likely, end there as well. Does wonder become the new tool of unbridled ignorance, of the sovereignty of force, or of a kinder, gentler form of economic co-opting of government, education, and daily life?

We end not with the answer to all life’s mysteries, nor with a shrug of the shoulders to the ways of power, but with a plea for questions and ambiguity, for the openness of wonder in the face of that which might but must not replace outer with inner obedience. Wonder sets the stage for educational practice, a practice that denies the noble lie, that asks what lies beyond usefulness, beyond the concentration camp, beyond the objects and subjects of knowledge. We do not know; we wonder, and, wondering, seek a doorway into diversity, ambiguity, and complexity, without apology but with courage. As M. C. Escher wrote, “He who wonders discovers that this is in itself a wonder” (2001).

It is almost as if, starting from a certain point, every decisive political event were double-sided: the spaces, the liberties, and the rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individual’s lives with the state order, thus offering a new and more dreadful foundation for the very sovereign power from which they wanted to liberate themselves. (Agamben, 1998, p.121)

*“Crushing weight” is right! But even Agamben begins with the “it is almost as if;” It is but not quite. Wonder lies in the incompleteness of these processes of subjectification at work in the expanding reach of economism. It seems quite convincing (at least to these authors) that these “dreadful foundations” are indeed being laid by projects like those tying spirituality to capital; but even so, just as intriguing is the subsequent question, “why then are we not there?” Why are we not in the camp? This alone provokes wonder and, perhaps, avenues of escape. Bill Reynolds, a curriculum theorist working through Deleuze, suggests that our work in conceptualizing schooling should ultimately,*

*be about developing new lines of flight. Line of flight (becomings) that allow, however contingently, briefly, or momentarily for us to soar vertically like a bird or slither horizontally, silently like a snake weaving our way amid the constant re- configurations, co-optations and movements of the ruins. (Reynolds, 2003 p.94)*

*The effort to conflate spirituality with global capitalism is without doubt a co-optation but as we stand on the ruins of what once seemed outside the reach of the vulgar rhetorics of development, we should always look for that line of flight, those becomings that momentarily provide escape. It is the expansive nature of global capital that creates its counterpoint — what Lefebvre calls “the incessant to and fro;” what Hardt and Negri call “Multitude.” This constant interactive movement pushes us from the thinking of “either/or” into the “yes/and?” of lines of flight, possibility. It is here that not only do we revel in the wonder but the wonder of wonders, hope.*

We're told businesses have souls, which is surely the most terrifying news in the world (Deleuze 1995, p.181).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of preserving the dialogic nature of this project, the philosopher's responses will be in normal font while the educational researcher's responses will be presented in italics.

<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive, thoughtful investigation of many of those difficulties, see Amartya Sen, (1987,

2000, and 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See Sen for an economist's attack on these standard claims of economics.

<sup>4</sup> “We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us can be questioned. Hence this initial skepticism will be a mere self-deception, and not real doubt; and no one who follows the Cartesian method will ever be satisfied until he has formally recovered all those beliefs which in form he has given up” (1868 p. 140).



# Tomson Highway's "The Rez" Plays: Theater as the (E)Merging of Native Ritual through Postmodernist Displacement.

By Oswald Yuan-Chin Chang

## Introduction

Canadian Native playwright Tomson Highway emerged on the national and international theatre scene with the production of two plays in the late 1980s: *The Rez Sisters*, first staged by Native Earth Performing Arts Toronto in 1986; and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, originally produced at Theatre Pass Muraille in Toronto in 1989. Both plays were extremely well-received at the time and made Highway the talk of the Canadian theatre establishment. Both plays won the Dora Mavor Moore Award for an Outstanding New Play (1988-89), as well as the Floyd S. Chalmers Canadian Play Award, given to Canadian plays produced professionally in the Toronto area.

Set on the fictional Wasaychigan ("Window") Hill reserve on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* can be seen as obverse sides of a coin—or as mirror images of the shared theme of "the big game", viewed from a gendered perspective. *The Rez Sisters* tells the story of seven Native women on a largely comic quest to attend The World's Biggest Bingo Game in the city of Toronto, several hundred miles from the reserve. There are no men in the play except, perhaps, for the figure of Nanabush, who resembles the "Trickster" Coyote from traditional Native mythology. *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* concentrates on seven men (some of whom are mentioned in *The Rez Sisters*), who must deal with the creation of a women's hockey team on the reserve. There are no women in the play, except for Nanabush, now manifested in various female forms.

This paper evaluates Highway's success in taking what is essentially an oral tradition of storytelling and translating it into a tradition in which designated actors perform a script for an audience in a specific space

designed especially for the performances. This transition is examined in terms of the theatrical form used by Highway, as well as the use of some of the elements from traditional storytelling and Native mythology (with special reference to Nanabush and how his/her role in Highway's plays differs significantly from that role in traditional storytelling). As well, the paper takes a look at how Highway manages to walk the fine line between Native ritual performance and theatrical entertainment. Finally, the paper examines Highway's ability to perform this transformation, arguing that his success depends on having avoided mimetic forms and making a leap instead from oral storytelling directly to a postmodern theatre that contains elements of the theatre of the absurd, magic realism, and hybridity.

### Turning the Oral into the Written Word

In the context of power relationships between Natives and the colonizers, the written English language has always been too easily twisted, too easily made to reflect whatever the colonizing forces wanted it to. In one creation story from the Salish people of the British Columbia interior, the white man acts as the betrayer of his older brother, the Native. As told by elder Harry Robinson, the younger brother, being literate, stole "the paper" from God and thus usurped the Native's rightful inheritance:

And that younger one,  
now today, that's the white man.  
And the older one, that's me.  
That's the Indian.  
And that's why the white man,  
they can tell a lie more than the Indian.  
But the white man, they got the law. (Robinson, 1989, pp. 45-46)

Thus, while Natives eventually became literate themselves, the original betrayal is still considered part of the colonizing process even today. Native writing tends to reflect the act of "remembering" (pre- and post-betrayal) so important in the oral storytelling tradition. According to Métis writer Emma LaRoque: "Some themes unique to a person dispossessed stand out: a haunting and hounding sense of loss that drives one to reminisce. 'I remember,' many of us write, 'I remember'." (xxviii).

At present, there seems to be some degree of symbiosis of the oral and written, a type of Native literature that LaRoque has called "transitional" and moving "from the oral to the written" (xxviii). At the same time, there is still uneasiness and the feeling of a clash between the two forms that goes beyond the mere instrumentality of the oral versus the written. According to Ong, for instance, "orally based thought" and "the technology of writing" are so different "that many of the contrasts often made between 'western' and other views seem reducible to contrasts between deeply interiorized literacy and more or less residually oral states of consciousness" (29).

According to LaRoque, this type of struggle has become internalized for the modern Native writer, who must operate in both worlds: “(w)hat is at work is the power struggle between the oral and the written, between the native in us and the English” (xx). At the same time, even writers who are able to take the traditional oral stories and convert them into written material express a type of dissatisfaction with the ability of the written stories to capture all of the texts and subtexts of the original oral stories. Native writer Basil Johnston, for example, writes in a note within his collection of short stories, *Moose Meat and Wild Rice*, that: “The stories as written cannot adequately convey the real nature or impart the scope of that sense of wit and humour that forms an integral part of the Ojibway people and their character” (188).

However, there has been an attempt to roll the oral style into the written page, and to use elements such as repetition, questions to the reader, and interjectory remarks as if the person in the book were speaking to the reader. As well, the stories of someone like Robinson work by using a different approach to time:

For Harry Robinson there is no distinction between past and present, mythological reality and reality documented in writing, history and story. The mythological past of humanity explains the present reality (like the existence of Europeans) and the present verifies the past, much like the story about the literate younger twin, the ancestor of the Europeans, who used his literacy to lie to his older brother, the ancestor of the Indian. (Eigenbrod 93)

This combination of “told” stories that are at the same time preserved on paper involves Natives walking a fine line between the two worlds. There is a demand that the principles that are part of the oral tradition—cyclical concept of time, mythology-history interacting, lack of separation between the symbolic and the realistic—be upheld in the written world.

Another connection between Native writing and the oral tradition from which it arises is the concept of collaboration, the connectedness between one individual and another, and between people and the natural world. According to Allen (1989): “Tribal art of all kinds embodies the principle of kinship, rendering the beautiful in terms of the connectedness of elements” (5).

Native writers are also quick to stress that the use of “I” under these circumstances should not be taken in the same way as the “I” in Western cultures. It is not an individual “I” but rather a communal one, once again reflecting a bringing together, a sense of union:

The emphasis on oneness as opposed to separations and divisions is an essential characteristic of tribal - and that means also oral - cultures. It is in this sense that stories can be written in an “oral form,” blending together the individual and the communal, the commonplace and the spiritual, the human and the supernatural, thus reflecting a circular rather than a linear way of thinking. (Eigenbrod 98)

In the next section, the paper looks at how Tomson Highway has taken this oral storytelling tradition and all that it implies, and attempted to produce a postmodern theatrical experience. This postmodern

performance experience tries to capture both the orality and the ritual qualities of Native culture, and tries to bring together the mythology-history of that culture in a world very much run by the colonizers, who do not believe in mythology and seem to have forgotten their own history.

### **From Storytelling to Postmodern Performance**

According to Tim Bond, the former artistic director of The Group, Seattle's MultiCultural Theatre "(w)hen you do realism, it doesn't speak to the greater aesthetic of Native-American culture. Yet traditional storytelling doesn't reach cross-culturally. We need a new, modern form" (Quoted in Outlaw. 83). In describing the play *The Indolent Boys* by N. Scott Momaday, which tells the story of how three Native boys freeze to death while trying to escape abuse at an Oklahoma school in 1891, Outlaw points out that "[t]he emphasis on resolving dramatic tension, so crucial to Western classical dramatic structure, is missing here ... Instead, the focus is on retelling the story over and over, in the Native tradition of the monologue, from various points of view" (Outlaw 84).

There is little argument that what we would call "theatrical elements" have played significant roles in the Native festivals, rituals and healing rites. Among those elements are role-playing, mimicry, dance, masking and song. In fact, Buller (1981) talks of a "traditional Native theatre in Canada" (3). For her part, Preston (1992) does not distinguish between Native ceremonial rites and theatrical performance: "Native drama flourished in this country long before the Europeans arrived and many of Canada's indigenous cultures had very complex and elaborate cultural performances. These were primarily religious dramas that used masks, props, lighting, and smoke effects" (136).

Highway himself has theorized on this subject, attempting to explain why the stage (in particular, the postmodern stage) serves as the best way to "translate" the oral traditions and storytelling performances of Native cultures. This is his vision of a type of syncretic theatre based on those oral traditions:

Why the stage? For me, the reason is that this oral tradition translates most easily and most effectively into a three dimensional medium. In a sense, it's like taking the 'stage' that lives inside the mind, the imagination, and transposing it--using words, actors, lights, sound--onto the stage in theatre. For me, it is really a matter of taking a mythology as extraordinary and as powerful as the human imagination itself and reworking it to fit, snugly and comfortably, the medium of the stage. (1987, 29)

While there is sufficient evidence to indicate that Native playwrights have made the leap into a postmodern theatrical approach in some ways similar to that employed by Western (Euro- American) playwrights, it is important to point out the key differences between the two. Among the obvious similarities are the use of a type of magical realism, inner monologues using spotlights, and time and space effects that can be described as surreal. There are also many of the theatrical tricks employed by French theatre of the absurd

playwrights such as Beckett and Ionesco. However, as pointed out by Usmani (1995), the differences lie in the use to which these devices are put. While Euro-American plays most often reflect “the negativism, nihilism and spiritual void of Western postmodern society . . .,” a play such as *The Rez Sisters*, in spite of the similarity of its dramatic matrix, reflects the essential humanism, life-affirming and hopeful world view of Native peoples” (127-128). Ironically, while the vast majority of Euro-American postmodern plays have given up on the idea of a humanistic society, Native playwrights such as Highway have embraced it, and have actually gone on to re-enforce it.

In the next section, the paper takes an in-depth look at Highway’s two best-known plays—*The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*—to determine how effective this “translation” from oral storytelling and ritual performance to a postmodern theatrical matrix has been.

### Mixing Mythological and Historical Time: Nanabush’s Legacy

There are several types of “translation” involved in the presentation of Highway’s two plays. The first has to do with the use of Cree and English in the plays and the movement from Cree, which is Highway’s mother tongue, and the finished English text for the stage production (with a smattering of Cree):

My characters speak in Cree, because I write about my home community where the people speak Cree. The older generation, my parents for example, and my older brothers and sisters, my aunts and uncles, don’t speak any English at all. So, when I write about them, and I write mostly about them, I have a picture of my cousins, my aunts and uncles, in my head. So my characters talk in Cree. And sometimes whole sections of the first draft will come out in Cree. So what I do, because I am a musician as well, I treat the language as music. I experiment with a form of English writing that attempts to capture the rhythm and the humour of the Cree language. Humour is very much at the centre of the Cree language. (Quoted in Balme, 1993. 395)

This translation can also be seen in the rhythm of the dialogue, which Highway manages to convey through the use of an English that lacks all punctuation and pulls together conjunctions in a string. As well, it should be noticed that, while not all the characters in *The Rez Sisters* recognize the trickster figure of Nanabush, those that do are the ones who can speak Cree, which suggests a connection between the mythological world and the historical one. The first time one of the seven female characters in the play, Marie-Adele, who is dying of cancer, sees Nanabush (appearing as a seagull) coming to get her to take her to the mythological world, the language becomes all mixed up:

NANABUSH. As-tum. [Come.]

MARIE-ADELE. Neee. Moo-tha ni-gus-kee-tan tu-pi-mi-tha-an. Moo-tha oo-ta-ta- gwu-na n’tay-yan. Chees-kwa. [Pause]. Ma-ti poo-ni-mee-see i-goo-ta wee-chi-gi- seagull bird come

shit on my fence one more time and you and anybody else look like you cook like stew on my stove. Awus! [Nee. I can't fly away. I have no wings. Yet. [Pause]. Will you stop shitting all over the place you stinking seagull bird]. (*The Rez Sisters*, 19)

Similarly, in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, Highway makes use of dialogues and monologues that are almost entirely devoid of punctuation. An example is the scene where Big Joey calls out the play by play sequences of a woman's ice hockey game that is not visible to the audience, mixing Cree, sport jargon and a rapid-fire delivery that combines Cree speech rhythms with the kind of sports commentary that most white people are familiar with:

BIG JOEY. [. . .] Number Thirty-seven Big Bum Pegahmagabow, defensewoman for the Wasy Wailerettes, stops the puck and passes it to Number Eleven Black Lady Halked, also defensewoman for the Wasy Wallerettes, but Gazelle Nataways, Captain of the Wasy Wailerettes, soogi body check meethew her own team-mate Black Lady Halked woops! She falls, ladies igwa gentlemen, Black Lady Halked hits the boards and Black Lady Halked is singin' the blues, ladies igwa gentlemen, Black Lady Halked sings the blues. (*Dry Lips*, 74)

In trying to explain the rhythm and tempo of Cree and why it comes across as humorous, Highway explains that Euro-American postmodernism is pessimistic and negative, while Native postmodernism still has a glimmer of hope and belief in it: "You laugh all the time when you speak it [Cree]. In spite of the violence on the reserve, the rhythm of the language is funny. It must have something to do with the Trickster being at the centre of it" (Quoted in Conologue, C5).

The second "translation" performed by Highway is the transformation of the Native rituals and rites of a tribal society into significant symbols and markers for a world that has for the most part abandoned any belief in those rituals. In other words, religious or spiritual belief has been transformed into art, and the creative spirit behind the myths and stories in the oral tradition have been changed into a new form of creativity, one that is highly visual and visceral at the same time: "Indian mythology is filled with the most extraordinary events, beings and creatures. These lend themselves so well to visual interpretation, to exciting stage and visual creation . . . Not only are the visuals powerful, the symbolism underlying these extraordinary stories is as basic and as direct as air" (Highway, 1987. 30).

The tremendous power of "translation" and transformation is represented nowhere as well as in the figure of Nanabush itself, a central character in both of Highway's plays. The trickster figure, known as Nanabush in Ojibwa mythology and Weesagechak in Cree, has some abilities that make it a perfect catalyst in a ritual or theatrical performance: Nanabush can change shape and become any human or animal figure, appear as either female or male or both, and, unlike Christian symbols, cannot be categorized as either mainly good or evil. As playwright Daniel David Moses points out: "The trickster figure shows the difference between native and Western cultures . . . Mainstream culture creates heroes to emulate; native cultures have the trickster figure, who more often than not you don't want to emulate" (Quoted in Kaplan. 19). Because Nanabush is all things to all people, as it were, Highway is able to use the creature in different

ways for different plays.

In *The Rez Sisters*, which is a comic, almost slapstick play about seven women on the reserve who decide, each for reasons of their own, to try to get down to Toronto and partake in what is being billed as the Biggest Bingo Game in the World, Nanabush plays an almost realist role. Nanabush appears three times in the play—as a seagull, a nighthawk, and then as a MC at the bingo game before reverting to the nighthawk image in a transformation that takes place on stage during the process of the action itself:

The figure of Nanabush in his various guises provides Highway with a means to bring into play a level of experience beyond the empirical and quotidian, which otherwise dominates the seven women's lives on the reservation. The intervention by Nanabush in their lives can be seen as analogous to structural features found in Native oral traditions, where the borders between mythological and empirical worlds are not clearly demarcated. In such stories Nanabush can operate in both worlds. (Balme, 178)

In *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, which features the men on the reservation who are in some way related to or connected with the women in *The Rez Sisters*, the themes are much darker and more disturbing. Here, Nanabush takes on several grotesquely exaggerated female roles, almost carnivalesque in appearance and intent. As Highway himself states in a foreword to the play:

So that by this system of thought, the central hero figure from our mythology-- theology, if you will--is theoretically neither exclusively male nor exclusively female, or is both simultaneously. [. . .] Some say that Nanabush left this continent when the white man came. We believe she/he is still here among us--albeit a little the worse for wear and tear having assumed other guises. Without the continued presence of this extraordinary figure, the core of Indian culture would be gone forever. (12)

In effect, what Highway does here is merge the iconic figure and representation of the mythical and folkloric Nanabush with the most obvious of Western cultural icons, images that have permeated and infiltrated all levels and all societies. This hybridity represents the new "spirituality" that results from the bringing together of these disparate images. In *The Rez Sisters*, we see the beginnings of this when the Bingo Caller MC morphs into the nighthawk, the bird of death come to carry Marie-Adele away. It is full-blown in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, with Nanabush on various occasions being: (a) A swollen-bellied drunken female perched on a jukebox and about to give birth to her Fetal Alcohol Syndrome damaged child; (b) A parody of the Christian deity sitting on a throne and dressed "in an old man's white beard and wig, but also wearing sexy, elegant women's high-heeled pumps" (Highway, 1989, 117); (c) An overweight teenage girl with an exaggerated artificial rear-end, almost clownish in effect.

Highway's intent in the presentation of what some might consider a sacrilegious vision of a figure that is after all a god in Native mythology seems two-fold: first, to indicate that a patriarchal society has created these bizarre body images after its own male image (as flashbacks on the part of the male members of the

reserve); second, as a way to deal a blow to the over-idealized and over-romanticized images of Native spirituality (a modern-day version of the figure of the “noble savage”):

If the mythological creature Nanabush is to survive as a contemporary and culturally appropriate stage figure, then he/she (this seems to be one of Highway’s messages in the play) will have to adapt to and assume images deriving from popular mass culture, which are an integral part of present-day Native experience. (Balme. 179-180)

Highway indicates as much when he describes Nanabush taking in the sights of Toronto’s downtown: “[H]e also takes strolls down Yonge Street, drinks beer, sometimes passes out at the Silver Dollar and goes shopping at the Eaton Centre. You should have seen him when he first encountered a telephone, an electric typewriter, a toaster, an automobile. I was there” (Highway, 1987. 29). In other words, Highway wants to make sure that his Nanabush is not confused with the trickster figure in Cree and Ojibway mythologies, no matter how much it might resemble that creature. According to Filewod (1994): “In both plays, Nanabush is a transformative agent whose presence enables the development of plot. Highway’s declared purpose in both plays is to show the still active role of the Trickster, as a metonym for suppressed spirituality, in the material lives of Native people” (366).

While Nanabush is central to Highway’s plays (they could not work without Nanabush), it must be remembered that he/she is part of an ensemble cast. As pointed out by Perkins (2002): “Nanabush is neither a contemporary nor a readily available figure; he is a figure brought back from the past of a culture that no longer exists in any coherent form ... The play’s emotional centre is not Nanabush himself but the ways in which other characters relate to him” (260).

That interaction between Nanabush and the characters in the plays is complex and multi-layered. In *The Rez Sisters*, while he is physically present on the stage, most of the characters do not see or comprehend his “real” nature. He is seen by them as simply another natural part of the world in which they exist at the present time, having lost the ability to view the “true” world where spirituality resides. The only two characters who see him as more than just a bird or bingo master are Marie-Adele who is dying of cancer, and Zhaboonigan, who is considered mentally handicapped and who was brutally raped as a child. There is a sense here that the play is running on two different time sequences – the mythological and the historical:

Nanabush’s time is a “time of the Other” not because it is “separate” from westernized time or from the time-scheme followed by the rest of the play, but because it is of a different nature. In Nanabush’s time, past and present are both intertwined and distinct. His function is to communicate his sense of time to the rest of the characters in the play. (Perkins. 260)

The two time sequences are different in another way: while Nanabush exists in circular time, the majority of the action of *The Rez Sisters* moves from start to finish in accordance with the western, lineal way of viewing time. But there are moments in the play (usually highlighted by spotlight monologues) in which circular time takes over. These are like a series of pauses in the frantic action going forward much like a



slapstick comedy:

[I]n these pauses and in the memories to which they give occasion, the play begins to gain a sense of its own past, the past of its characters, and the past of their culture. The scenes in which characters remember the past are scenes in which their identities and their histories are set against the inexorable movement of time. The most significant of these scenes are inspired by or presided over by Nanabush, whose complex temporal allegiance provides an opportunity for the laboriously creative act of remembering. (Perkins. 261)

Perhaps the best explanation of Nanabush time versus linear time can be found in the scene where Marie-Adele dances with the Bingo Caller and the Bingo Caller slowly morphs into the nighthawk:

[...] the calm, silent image of Marie-Adele [emerges] waltzing romantically in the arms of the Bingo Master. [...]

MARIE-ADELE U-wi-nuk u-wa? U-wi-nuk u-wa? Eugene? Nee. U-wi-nuk ma-a oo-ma kee-tha? Ka. Kee-tha i-chi-goo-ma so that's who you are ... at rest upon the rock ... the master of the game ... the game ... it's me [...] come ...come ... ["Who are you? Who are you? Eugene? Nee. Then who are you really? Oh. It's you, so that's who you are."] (103-04; translation in original)

It is this scene more than any other that distinguishes Highway's plays from those of Western postmodern playwrights, even those of the theatre of the absurd, with which they have many things in common. The reaching out from the "time of the Other" leads to a different idea of death than the one most white audiences have become accustomed to:

In Nanabush's world, preparation for death does not involve sorrow or repentance, as it does in the Christian tradition, but a certain amount of pain, a good deal of talking, a night or two on the town, and a willingness to accept ironic coincidences. Death, the final "game" of which Nanabush is master, arises out of the chaos and the banality of the bingo hall and out of the theatrical act of remembering that takes place there. (Perkins. 266)

This sort of transcendence is not found in the plays of Beckett or Stoppard. In fact, without this understanding of the role of Nanabush in the plays, it is difficult to understand the central action of *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. This is a play that is rife with violence and a series of disturbing events that make the audience squirm, including degradation and rape. At the same time, the play ends with a life-affirming scene in which a character that has been dreaming (again a representation of another time) lifts up a newborn baby.

The central action of the play circles around the attempt to create a woman's ice hockey team on the reserve. However, we never see the female hockey players—nor any women at all other than in the

transformations carried out by Nanabush. On stage are seven men from the reserve, the main ones being Big Joey, a self-professed sexual athlete; Simon Starblanket, who dreams of bringing back the old ways with the help of his fiancée Patsy; Dickie Bird Halked, who suffers from foetal alcohol syndrome; and Zachary, the dreamer. Through the series of Nanabush inspired flashbacks, we are shown how Dickie Bird's mother, staggering drunk, gave birth to him as she leaned against a jukebox in a tavern and how Big Joey, the father, fled from the scene, all his puffed-up masculine attitude vanishing in an act of supreme cowardice. Confusing visions of his mother's horrible labor with another character's harangues on the pain of Christ on the cross, Dickie Bird brutally rapes Patsy with a crucifix. When in a drunken stupor, Simon learns of this, he goes after Dickie Bird but ends up accidentally shooting himself.

Thus, Nanabush's transformations go beyond those of gender, and beyond any naturalistic transition from one play to the next. While Nanabush was an ethereal bird/dancer in *The Rez Sisters*, the opposite is true in *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*:

Nanabush is corporeality personified, appearing as grotesque versions of the women in these men's daily lives: Gazelle Nataways, the temptress who compromises Zachary's happy marriage; Black Lady Halked, Big Joey's alcoholic mistress and Dickie Bird's slattern mother; and Patsy, the hope of new life and new spiritual awareness ... to emphasize the larger-than-life sexual importance these women have for the Wasy men, Nanabush dons oversized prosthetic devices for their sexual characteristics: huge rubberized breasts for Gazelle, big buttocks for Patsy, and a full-term belly for Black Lady Halked. (Johnston, 1990. 262)

That a tragic play such as this could turn out to have the kind of silver lining that it displays at the end would not be possible without an acceptance of the role of Nanabush in all of this. He is, after all, "the shaman, who is taking all seven men into a dream world, knowing that before the healing can take place, the poison must be exposed ..." (Honegger. 90, citing a phrase Highway uses in the preface to the published play). In this sense, the nightmare has to be seen through, has to be enacted: "The nightmare contains the healing process: The comedic imagination, ancient gift of the trickster, outsmarts the terror: Storytelling as performance in process is a triumphant proof of continuity: a culture creates itself anew through each act of telling, of performing" (91).

Thus, it is possible for the nightmare to end with Zachary finding himself back in his own house (while in the dream he is in Gazelle Nataway's house with no pants on). It is also possible to travel back in time with Nanabush to a time before language, "toward the big bang of the all-burning, the originary moment of creation ... This world is one of shimmerings, of flickering fires, of space beyond language ... the space beyond the origin of our world, the space that moves one toward ... that moment of the birth of the cosmos ... the world before poison is poured into the ear of the king and into the minds of the Highway characters in the fallen world of the tragic circle" (Imboden. 121-122).

In this world, redemption is possible for everyone, even Big Joey, whose effort to outdo the white man results in the hyper-masculinity that is responsible for so much of the horror and pain in the play's narrative.

In the dream, it is when the men on the reserve assume extreme gender positions that the tragedies take place, when they adopt the Western attitude that masculinity embodies: “success and status, toughness and independence, aggressiveness and dominance,” (Herek. 568). At one point, when he feels the need to explain why he allowed his son Dickie Bird to rape Patsy when he could have stopped it, Big Joey says: “Because I hate them! I hate them fuckin’ bitches. Because they—our own women—took the fuckin’ power away from us faster than the FBI ever did” (120). The attitude is one held by many white males who feel emasculated in the postmodern world characterized by non- canonicity and a lack of hierarchy. According to Fortier (2002):

Highway’s theatre is profoundly concerned with the differences between native women and native men; at the same time, especially in the figure of Nanabush, Highway presents a place beyond simple gendered identity and oppression. Nanabush presents a native alternative to restrictive binary identities which for Highway are in large measure the imposition of western patriarchy on native culture. In a similar tension, *Dry Lips* combines a culturally acceptable, often restrictive, male homosocial structure with hints of a repressed homoeroticism which upsets the binary order from another direction. (205)

Yet at the same time there is a transgression of fixed gender roles in Highway’s plays—and not just with Nanabush’s ability to assume either role (or both in the case of the Christian deity on the toilet bowl throne). For example, he has the men baking bread and knitting baby garments while the women play hockey. As well, there is more than a hint of homoerotic sexual tension in the adoration and worship displayed by Creature Nataways towards Big Joey. In the end, even Big Joey feels the power of redemption. Announcing of the hockey game, he says “(t)here they are, the most beautiful, daring, death defying Indian women in the world, the Wasy Wailerettes!” (124).

The play ends with the Nanabush-inspired dream/nightmare coming to a conclusion once the poison has been exposed, followed by this description of the celebration of new life, despite all the horrors and tragedies that have already taken place and that are bound to take place in the future:

The baby finally gets “dislodged” from the blanket and emerges, naked. And the last thing we see is this beautiful naked Indian man lifting this naked baby Indian girl up in the air, his wife sitting beside them watching and laughing. Slow fade-out. Split seconds before complete back-out, Hera peals out with this magical, silvery Nanabush laugh, which is echoed and echoed by one last magical arpeggio on the harmonica, from off-stage. Finally, in the darkness, the last sound we hear is the baby’s laughing voice, magnified on tape to fill the entire theatre. And this, too, fades into complete silence. (*Dry Lips*. 129-130)

This scene requires no words. There is no way the audience can confuse what is going on—or can attribute it to either a Native or Western way of thinking. The celebration here is meant to be universal, primitive and pre-linguistic. This is the culmination of what Imboden (1995) describes as the “strange dialectical movement” that “pervades the play: one is the exodus of those fleeing bondage, and one is the free falling

through time of those seeking the origin of the giving which created the universe” (123).

### **Bringing Ritual and Performance Together: Concluding Remarks**

At the core of Highway’s writing is the question of Native authenticity and identity. What does it mean to be of Native heritage in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is there an essential Native culture that can be “picked out” as it were and held up for display? His attempt at answering these questions is also at the core of *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*. According to Filewod (1994):

The problem of white reception of aboriginal theatre is a problem in the dialectics of deconolonization and reinscribed colonization, in which voices of cultural affirmation and resistance are received by white critics as a testament of authentic and unmediated reality, which, in critical response, disallows the agency of resistance itself. (364)

At the same time, it is argued that hybridity can lead to the destruction of the original Native culture: “The contradiction develops when critics who accept western realist dramaturgy as the least mediated, most natural theatrical form find these two essentialisms, aboriginal and dramaturgical, in conflict” (364).

Highway has managed to navigate these two “essentialisms” in a way that gets across the way the two values are not really essential but are actually themselves constructs. He re-creates a creature from classical Native mythology and incorporates it into the structure of his plays so that what was previously an essential element of Native spirituality is now an essential element of a postmodern play. In one stroke, Highway undoes both essentialisms while at the same time making a bid for a third one, one that he feels is truly essential for the human spirit. Through Nanabush and the rituals that he/she brings into the postmodern theatre, Highway is able to fold together the strands of the various elements that combine to create Native identity today: a combination of nostalgia for the ancient rites and rituals (which in some sense are still there because they are eternal), resistance against the effects of being colonized and having their religion and spirituality stripped from them, and cultural re-birth in the form of the one true essentialism, that which Highway sees as the creativity of the human spirit in all its manifestations. As Conlogue puts it: “The ‘poison’ is the rage and humiliation locked up inside the native people ... the ‘healing’ is the power of laughter and the power of dreams. Both these medicines are part of native thought, but it is Highway’s particular talent to ransack the conventions of Western theatre and find forms appropriate for them that make sense for non-natives as well” (A17).

In a broader sense, Highway’s appropriation of “the conventions of Western theatre” expands his vision of the Native experience to fit the framework of the pessimistic post-modern spirit. As Oliver Bennett remarks in his critique of the phenomenon of widespread “cultural pessimism” at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, postmodern pessimism finds its origins in environmental destruction, the loss of cultural authenticity in the midst of “identity politics,” and the growing “conviction that the culture of a nation, a civilisation

of humanity itself is in an irreversible process of decline” (Bennett. 1-12). And Highway’s use of psychoanalytic tropes and images draws upon another famously pessimistic worldview, the late Freudian conclusion that the aggressive death instinct *thanatos* must ultimately prevail over the life instinct *eros*, a conclusion seemingly borne out by the 20<sup>th</sup> century experience of world war, holocaust and disasters. For Highway, however, the spirit of pessimism is not necessarily universal, and has more to do the debasement of the Native American identity in the modern context of commercialism, pop culture and widespread spiritual anomie.

Against this spirit of pessimism regarding the loss of Native American identity, however, Highway also projects an opposing vision grounded in humor, irony and protective adaptation to the contemporary scene. In doing so, Highway apparently rejects the classical/modernist dichotomy with its obsessive focus on universal values and perfect form and balance. Thus, Highway turns what could be a crisis in cultural authenticity (the mis- representation of basic Native rituals and cultural icons such as Nanabush) into the creation of a new form of authenticity. This authenticity relies on the creativity found in the performance of our basic humanity, elements that need to be found in all societies if those societies wish to survive.

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# Baudrillard and Hölderlin and the Poetic Resolution of the World.

By Gerry Coulter

*We have no footing anywhere,  
No rest, we topple, Fall and suffer  
Blindly from hour  
To hour like water Pitched from fall  
To fall, year in,  
Year out, headlong,  
Downward for years to the vague abyss  
(Hölderlin, *Hyperion's Song*, 1990:20).<sup>1</sup>*

We are merely epigones. ...The highest level of intensity lies behind us. The lowest level of passion and intellectual illumination lies ahead of us (Baudrillard, 1990b:150).

## I. Introduction

Across a wide array of disciplines becoming post-disciplines young scholars today are struggling to find a use for the writings of Jean Baudrillard. Looking at Baudrillard in relation to Hölderlin helps us to deepen our understanding of the role of the poetic in his writing. Absence and reversibility come to the fore here alongside a fatal optimism that finds joy in writing (which for Baudrillard is often an attempt to resolve the world poetically). No matter how angry or disappointed, “the wise in the end often bow to the beautiful” (Hölderlin, *Socrates and Alcibiades*, 1994:49).

For Baudrillard “theory could even be poetry” (1990:24), and he needed the poetic to live and write. During his lifetime Baudrillard had watched the world drift into delirium and it opened him to a delirious point of view – one without homage to any principle of truth or causality (2000:68). He understood that



poems, fables, stories, parables, and fiction are as “real” as anything else in this world. They permitted him to grant to events both a poetic singularity and an analysis which was at home in radical uncertainty (2000:68).

Baudrillard resisted the easy solution and his poetic sensibility led him to challenge his readers to probe the course of events and their possible meanings more deeply. Complex events like September 11, 2001 are strangely affirming of this kind of view of the world [he pointed to the poetic notion that the twin towers committed suicide in response to the attacks of the suicide planes (2003:43)]. This is difficult poetry but its author was convinced that he lived in a time when “everything in the moral, political and philosophical spheres is heading towards the lowest common denominator” (1998b:103). Perhaps the resonance of consternation they evoked was just loud enough to penetrate through the deafening cacophony of banal explanations of the event.

As an entry point into an assessment of Hölderlin and Baudrillard it is worthwhile to begin when Baudrillard first worked seriously with Hölderlin’s work. France has long been home to German translators of the highest rank. Why was Baudrillard (then a young high-school German teacher), hired to translate Hölderlin? Aside from the fact that he was an expert in German and understood the nuances of the language fluently, what was it about Baudrillard that qualified him to translate a poet of such notoriety? We can only probe the answer in retrospect but whomever hired Baudrillard may have glimpsed within him someone who, like Hölderlin, had an ear for the “background noise of the universe” (Baudrillard, 1996:2) and could hear the “silent laughter of flowers, grass, plants and forest” (2002:1). These sounds, so clear to Hölderlin’s ear, were heard by almost no one in modernity.

The first point of intersection between Hölderlin and Baudrillard then is a poetic sensibility. I begin with an assessment of this sensibility and other points of convergence between he and Hölderlin (Section II). Next I turn to the place of fiction (one of poetry’s synonyms) in Baudrillard’s thought (Section III), before identifying his fatal [tragic] optimism against human efforts to replace older views of transcendence with efforts to perfect this world (Section IV). Section V examines Hölderlin’s most significant influence on Baudrillard – the idea of reversibility [where danger grows, so does that which saves]. Section VI brings the Hölderlin – Baudrillard relationship up to date in the deserts of post-modernity.

## II. A Poetic Resolution of the World

Human, too human, the mania which insists there is only the One, one country, one truth and one way (Hölderlin, *The Root of All Evil*, 1994:53).

For reality asks nothing other than to submit itself to hypotheses. And it confirms them all. That, indeed, is its true ruse and vengeance (1996:99).

Queen Truth, may you not thrust my thinking up against a coarse lie (Hölderlin, *Of Truth*, 1994:633).

Baudrillard is a striking example of system failure – a system’s failure to fully integrate each individual despite the ruthless and comprehensive regimes of education and socialization compulsory for each person. Hölderlin was an interesting example of system failure in his own time. Baudrillard is a strong example of the kind of thinker who understands the irony of community, and that the biggest battle any of us face is against the collective. This perspective imbues Baudrillard with a deep suspicion of the real. In a time in which truth “no longer affords a solution” (a similarity between Hölderlin’s and Baudrillard’s time), “perhaps” says Baudrillard, “we can aim at a poetic resolution of the world” (2000:68).

Poetic resolution becomes for him a strategy of resistance to systematization while leaving open the possibility of thought. This includes, for example, asking us to think about what we are pursuing in our concern for security in an era of both state-sponsored and freelance terrorism:

...what kind of state would be capable of dissuading and annihilating all terrorism in the bud...? It would have to arm itself with such terrorism and generalize terror on every level. If this is the price of security, is everybody deep down dreaming of this? (1990c:22).

This passage is an example of Baudrillard’s poetic approach which is close to what we often refer to as poetic justice – the reversible. It forces us to look beyond current fears to the implications of our thoughts and actions – for ourselves. In a world which disappointed him at every turn this was the most generous gift Baudrillard could offer in return.

Against a world that consistently disappointed him and denied sustained pleasure Hölderlin sought poetic resolution. The ancient Gods had departed from the minds of his contemporaries, presence was lost, and the only thing appearing to him in plenty was absence. The absence of the world was reinforced in the detail of his fragmentary writing – a characteristic shared by Baudrillard’s writing. In the writings of both men it is the real which is absent, and both are joyous absentees from the “real” world. Writing became a vehicle for achieving escape velocity from a world of absence. Both men also understood that it is subtraction which is the most powerful force – “power emerges from absence” (1997:9). This was more common knowledge in Hölderlin’s time but is now mostly forgotten in our time of proliferation.

Baudrillard’s writing takes on the poetic quality of “slimming things down and reducing stocks” – “to escape fullness you have to create voids between spaces so that there can be collisions and short-circuits” (1993:38). Baudrillard understood, along with Kenneth White (whom he credits for the idea), that poetry today exists everywhere but in poetry. The challenge is to find poetic power – the poetic function in its primal state” (*Ibid.*) elsewhere – such as in theoretical writing.<sup>2</sup> If writing is to aim at a total resolution of the world then why should this not be a poetic resolution? (1996:100) It is for this reason that the kinds of writing which are obsessed with meaning (ideological and moral), are so unconcerned with the act of writing which, for Baudrillard, involves “the poetic, ironic, allusive force of language, ...the juggling with

meaning” (*Ibid.*:103). Baudrillard believes that art ought to be concerned with illusion – otherwise all it does is mirror the world around it and therefore serves no purpose. As an art, writing then is concerned with the “poetic transfiguration of the world” (1997:140). This could be quite playful as in his poetic “fate-based unrealist analysis” of the death of Diana:

On the one hand, if we assess all that would have had not to have happened for the event not to take place, then quite clearly it could not but occur. There would have to have been no Pont de l’Alma, and hence no Battle of the Alma. There would have had to have been no Mercedes, and hence no German car company whose founder had a daughter called Mercedes. No Dodi and no Ritz, nor all the wealth of the Arab princes and the historical rivalry with the British. The British Empire itself would have had to have been wiped from history. So everything combines, *a contrario and in absentia*, to demonstrate the urgent necessity of this death. The event therefore, is itself unreal, since it is made up of all that should not have taken place for it not to occur. And, as a result, thanks to all those negative probabilities, it produces an incalculable effect. (Baudrillard, 2001:136-37).

This passage demonstrates Baudrillard’s more playful understanding of his art – the art of writing (which is at the core of the art of theory), to “confront objects with the absurdity of their function, in a poetic unreality” (1997b:13). This includes a certain poetic confrontation with the art of writing theory itself as in this exquisite passage on human experience:

Everyday experience falls like snow. Immaterial, crystalline and microscopic, it enshrouds all the features of the landscape. It absorbs sounds, the resonance of thoughts and events; the wind sweeps across it sometimes with unexpected violence and it gives off an inner light, a malign fluorescence which bathes all forms in crepuscular indistinctness. Watching time snow down, ideas snow down, watching the silence of some aurora borealis light up, giving in to the vertigo of enshrouding and whiteness (1990:59).

Or this poetic passage written on the journey home in his *America*:

At 30,000 feet and 600 miles per hour, I have beneath me the ice-flows of Greenland, the *Indes Galantes* in my earphones, Catherine Deneuve on the screen, and an old man asleep on my lap. ‘Yes, I feel all the violence of love...’ sings the sublime voice, from one time zone to the next. The people in the plane are asleep. Speed knows nothing of the violence of love. Between one night and the next, the one we came from and the one we shall land in, there will have been only four hours of daylight. But the sublime voice, the voice of insomnia travels even more quickly. It moves through the freezing, trans-oceanic atmosphere, runs along the long lashes of the actress, along the horizon, violet where the sun is rising, as we fly along in our warm coffin of a jet, and finally fades away somewhere off the coast of Iceland (1988:24).

A key aspect of the enigmatic quality of Baudrillard’s writing is to be found in its poetic nature – he was

a theorist who did not sacrifice the art of writing to the concepts he wrote about – if he did he would have produced merely sociology and therein reduced poetic enigmas to meaning. Poetry is a synonym for fiction and the fabulous. “Theory is”, after all, “never so fine as when it takes the form of a fiction or a fable” (2006:11). The closing down of systemic meaning opens new poetic ones (2005:71). The expression of the poetic depends on language and the role of language (recalling Lacan) “is to stand in for meaning” which is eternally absent (1990b:6).

In Hölderlin’s time it was still possible to look to the past, to the stars, and to natural elements for meaning in an uncertain world while retaining hope in the future. Baudrillard does not have such luxuries in his time and he wonders if we really want to have to choose between meaning and non-meaning today. He says the point is that we do not want this choice because while meaning’s absence is intolerable “it would be just as intolerable to see the world assume a definitive meaning” (2001:128). This would be the end of thought, poetry and writing. Such is the goal of every techno-science of our time which will ultimately challenge the human to the core:

If we discover that not everything can be cloned, simulated, programmed, genetically and neurologically managed, then whatever survives could be truly called “human”: some inalienable and indestructible human quality could finally be identified. Of course, there is always the risk, in this experimental adventure, that nothing will pass the test – that the human will be permanently eradicated (2000:15-16).

If Baudrillard preferred fiction to science it may well have been because fiction holds a greater power in the mind of one whose hopes are fatal.

Night does not fall, objects secrete it at the end of day when, in their tiredness, they exile themselves into their silence (Baudrillard, 1990b:149).

### **III. Fiction – and the Extermination of Value**

“Only the vertiginous seduction of a dying system remains (Baudrillard, 1994:153).

One of the challenges faced by those inclined toward poetic resolution is to allow the poetic aspect of things to flow through him or her, just as it is the task of the painter to find the light given off by objects from within. For Baudrillard, the poetic sensibility also defines itself in an awareness of contradiction and reversibility – “when things contradict their very reality – this too is poetic” (1996:59). The poetic is central to that which remains fundamentally radical in Baudrillard: “I really don’t think of myself as a philosopher, my impulse comes from a radical temperament which has more in common with poetry than philosophy” (1993:131). From the standpoint of writing and theory Baudrillard’s absolute radicality resides in his poetic approach to the world, which is deeply steeped in fable and fiction. Often he

used a fable to illustrate a point. I wonder if he ever did so more poetically than in his use of “Death in Samarkand” to illustrate the distractions that can be caused by even a single sign:

Consider the story of the soldier who meets Death at a crossing of the marketplace, and he believes he saw him make a menacing gesture in his direction. He rushes to the king’s palace and asks the king for his best horse in order that he might flee during the night far from Death, as far as Samarkand. Upon which the king summons Death to the palace and reproaches him for having frightened one of his best servants. ‘I didn’t mean to frighten him. It was just that I was surprised to see this soldier here, when we had a *rendez-vous* tomorrow in Samarkand’ (1990d:72).

That one (or an entire society?) would run towards one’s fate by attempting to avoid it is the kind of poetic irony that informs so much of Baudrillard’s thinking. We find references to Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* in at least nine of Baudrillard’s books (1983; 1990c; 1993b; 1993c; 1995; 1998; 2001b; 2001c; 2005b). This fable is brought forward into our own time [Mandeville wrote it in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century] as a poetic way of understanding that corruption is vital to a society’s success – “the splendor of a society depends on its vices” (1993b:102). Baudrillard also draws on the fable of *The Sorcerers Apprentice* (1997b:24); Guido Ceronetti’s *Incest Fable* (1993b and 2001:93); and several fables from Borges: *The Mirror People* (1996:148); *The Lottery in Babylon* (1990d:150; 1996:91; 2001:93); and *The Map and the Territory* (1994:1; 1996:47; 2000:63). Such fables become poetic mirrors for Baudrillard about his own time. In the case of Borges’ *The Map and the Territory* he says we need to turn this fable upside down for our own time:

We live as if inside Borges’s fable of the map and the territory; in this story nothing is left but pieces of the map scattered throughout the empty space of the territory. ... Today there is nothing left but a map (the virtual abstraction of the territory), and on this map some fragments of the real are still floating and drifting (2000:63).

Also, at several junctures, Baudrillard cites Arthur C. Clarke’s parable *The Nine Billion Names of God* (1990c; 1993c; 1996; 1996b; and 1997b) to refer to our current circumstance. In it a community of Tibetan monks have been listing the many names of God for centuries. Growing tired they call in experts from IBM and the computers finish the job in a month. What the technicians did not know was the prophecy that once the nine billion names of God had been recorded the world would end. As they come down from the mountain the stars in the sky begin to disappear one by one (see Baudrillard, 2000:42). Baudrillard liked to employ such references to poetic outcomes (in our prosaic moment) to point to the absence of fulfillment by techno-science in our time.

Fiction (especially novels) also plays an enormous role in Baudrillard’s poetic thinking. He writes of the fiction of Western values with a poetic twist – arguing that it is not the presence of Western values that people outside of the West detest – as much as the West’s absence of values (2002b:65). Even the super-power America is reduced to a powerful fiction (1988:95, 1993:132) and he is never more poetic than

in his assessment of Disneyland as a “deterrence machine for the rejuvenation of the fiction of reality” (1994:13) and that Disneyland exists to hide the fact that all of “real” America is Disneyland (*Ibid.*:12). *America* is his fiction about a powerful fiction – the land of “just as it is” (1988:28) and “the last remaining primitive society” – “the primitive society of the future” (1988:7). Many Americans, especially the men of the Right, hated Baudrillard’s poetic and fictive *America* – with them in mind I prefer to read the book as an unauthorized exposé by a secret traveler in their midst. One wonders if it is the same group who work so hard to protect Americans from Baudrillard who have also played some role, historically, in protecting them from Hölderlin. Like Baudrillard, Hölderlin is not widely known in America (Unger, 1984:iii)

The poetic (poems, fables, fiction, stories, parables) is for Baudrillard part of his deep appreciation of ambivalence and ambiguity (1993c:215) and is important to how he copes with the extermination of value (*Ibid.*:198). We do not discover anything in poetic enjoyment and this is a vital part of what makes the poetic a radical experience (*Ibid.*:208). The poetic involves an “insurrection of a language against its own laws” (*Ibid.*:198) and it allows us to resist the “repressive interiorized space of language” (*Ibid.*:234), providing the basis for the “mutual volitization of the status of the thing and discourse” (*Ibid.*:235). He finds no room for poetry in psychoanalysis, in ideology, nor in morality – these are “brute forms of writing burdened with the concept” (*Ibid.*:223). Poetry then is the place of the “redistribution of symbolic exchange in the very heart of words” (*Ibid.*:205) and the “site of the extermination of value and the law” (*Ibid.*:195).

Perhaps it is not surprising that the Baudrillard who was yet to write so poetically of the poetic exuded something of these thoughts in his approach to the world which made him an obvious choice to translate Hölderlin. And perhaps it was the deep encounter of the thoughtful young translator with a poet of Hölderlin’s frustrations, insight, and ability to go on, that gave him at least some of his preference for the enchantments of poetry over the disappointments of the real. Hölderlin remained with him until the end, making more frequent appearances in the final decade of Baudrillard’s writing.

#### IV. After Transcendence

*Where are the children of happiness now, the believers?  
Home with the distant fathers, their great days forgotten,  
Strolling by Lethe, and longing won't bring them  
Back into sight, you will never appear  
On any of the thousand paths of the flowering earth  
Like gods, wherever the search goes, and I, whom your language  
Reached and the legend of you, must I grieve and grieve  
And my soul go down to your shades before its time?*  
(Hölderlin, *The Archipelago*, 1990:27).

Baudrillard said of Hölderlin: “No one else ever managed to bring the explosive silence of language to

such limits” (2005b:231). Like Hölderlin, Baudrillard remained as suspicious of all efforts to perfect the world as he did of efforts to explain it with certainty. On poetry he said: “the words refer to each other, creating a pure event, in the meantime they have captured a fragment of the world, even if they have no identifiable referent from which a practical instruction can be drawn” [in this he found poetry similar to the fragmentary nature of photography] (2005b:73). Hölderlin’s poetry is not in the business of making the world more certain or more knowable any more than is Baudrillard’s thought:

Here, however, lies the task of philosophical thought: to go to the limit of hypotheses and processes, even if they are catastrophic. The only justification for thinking and writing is that it accelerates these terminal processes. Here, beyond the discourse of truth, resides the poetic and enigmatic value of thinking. For, facing a world that is unintelligible and enigmatic, our task is clear: we must make that world even more unintelligible, even more enigmatic (2000:83).<sup>3</sup>

While Baudrillard is no Romantic, he does find something of a kindred spirit in Hölderlin, who was also deeply engaged with a painful and seemingly endless frustration with the world (1990d:111). Hölderlin spent his creative vitality trying to put into words that which was nearly indescribable – his words record the sublime frustrations of the poet. Baudrillard is frustrated by his times – by what we gave up in “cancelling our metaphysical contract and making another more perilous one with things” (2001b:36; see also 1983b:149) – and by living in a time in which it is more important to have things in which not to believe, than to believe (surrounded as we are today by fundamentalists such as Bush and bin Laden). What differentiates Baudrillard from Hölderlin is that the latter alerts us constantly to the role of the ancient gods. Nietzsche followed by pointing to the death of god and Baudrillard wrote about the consequences of this death. For Baudrillard (and this is part of his early departure from Marxism)<sup>4</sup>, the death of god is the end of transcendence.

The end of transcendence and responsibility to another world beyond our own meant that transcendence became secular and the effort to make the world transparent and operational replaced it. For Baudrillard, the death of god is the root of the perfect crime – good and evil become split – and our efforts go into making the world better only to see it go from bad to worse (2004:105). One could view Hölderlin’s notion: “Until the absence of God comes to our aid” (cited in Baudrillard 2001:131; 2004:105), as one that Baudrillard would find disagreeable. He does not however, as the attempt to perfect this world [through techno-science] will almost certainly lead to systemic collapse – Baudrillard’s fatal hope – and his fatal optimism in reversibility.

Like Hölderlin Baudrillard was disappointed but no thinker who writes does so without hope. Constantine says what we get from Hölderlin is a “passionate and generous hope” (see Hölderlin, 1990:7). For me, what we get from Baudrillard is a fatal hope – an optimism about the reversibility of systems. Following the current period of the proliferation of information, security, and technology (the era of the perfect crime), Baudrillard hopes for a collapse. Hölderlin and Baudrillard share a certain poetic disposition and a way of resolving their world into poetic writing – often of a fragmentary nature. Baudrillard, living in

extreme times, takes the problematic to a more radical conclusion as we no longer have the same kind of hope in a distant future that Hölderlin did. Such is the uncertainty of our times, which are invested in Baudrillard's fatal hope of systemic collapse.

Baudrillard said that Hölderlin could not be read in a continuous and constructive way – “he lends himself, as an influence, to the writing of fragments” (2004:22). And as he later told an interviewer: “behind all my theoretical and analytical formulations, there are always traces of aphorism, the anecdote and the fragment, one could call that poetry” (1993:166). The poetic for Hölderlin and Baudrillard shares the role of offering a resolution, in writing, of an unsatisfactory, uncertain, and unknowable world. What is vital to the two men is that they were not only writers – but writers who understood that text is a real as anything else. The love of text, its necessity to living and thought, lead both writers to push the limits of language and this is one factor that makes both such a pleasure to read.

The end of transcendence also means that humans must face the complete and utter indifference of the universe to our increasingly meaningless existence. Perhaps we should see Hölderlin's sublime poetry as an attempt to stand against this indifference. Baudrillard in his time similarly attempts to match the indifference of the universe through the poetic resolution of writing: “indifference is my form of terrorism, in another social context I would be a terrorist, but here we have to stick to talking [writing]” (1993:195). Baudrillard finds his politics (and his politics *is* writing) – in a fatal optimism steeped in the hope of systemic reversion. If we sometimes find Baudrillard difficult, it is important to keep this in mind – he is very unlike most “great” thinkers whom we read as their hopes are mainly channeled towards improving the current system.<sup>5</sup>

## V. Radical Optimism and Reversibility

*Where is Athens now? Oh, grieving god, has your city,  
The one you loved best, that reached from your sacred shores,  
Collapsed under ash entirely and buried even under her graves?  
Or are there remains, might a sailor,  
Passing, remember her name and call her to mind?  
Were there not columns once, risen up, and did not  
The figured gods shine down from the citadel roof?  
And the turbulent voice of the people murmured  
Louder out of the Agora, the streets hurried down  
Through the boisterous gates to your port full of blessings  
(Hölderlin, *The Archipelago*, 1990:23).*

...why not take the view that the fundamental rule is that of evil, and that any happy event throws itself into question? Is it not true optimism to consider the world a fundamentally



negative event, with many happy exceptions? By contrast, does not true pessimism consist in viewing the world as fundamentally good, leaving the slightest accident, to make us despair of that vision? Such is the rule of a radical optimism, we must take evil as the basic rule, (Baudrillard, 1997:138).

Hölderlin's memory of Athens conjures Herodotus's memory of those who were "great long ago" but who have now "become small" (Herodotus, 1998: Book I, v). We have called this aspect of human passage many things. Some call it poetic justice (such as the fall of great empires into small satellites of new empires); others have referred to it as the turning of the wheel of fortune. "Human happiness never remains long in the same place" (*Ibid.*) For Baudrillard it is part of the most poetic thing we know – that which comes as close to justice as anything we ever experience as humans: reversibility – the poetic reversibility of one thing into another (1993c:220). This includes everything from vast empires of long ago to the death of a friend:

A friend has died. The death of a friend finds its own justification *a posteriori*: it makes the world less liveable, and therefore renders his absence from this world less painful. It alters the world in such a way that he would no longer have his place in it (2002:65).

For Baudrillard reversibility is the fundamental rule (2005:41) but this does not imply a determinism in his thought – indeed, reversibility is an absolute weapon against determinism (1990c:82). Baudrillard notes that the reversibility of things, which is an ironic form today, does not entail an eighteenth-century romantic viewpoint. Rather, it means that, for us: "a strange game is being played" and we do not know all the rules of this game – in our time, indifference has become a strategic terrain (1993:175).

There is one passage from Hölderlin which appears numerous times in Baudrillard's writing and it is the passage in which Hölderlin acknowledges the poetry of reversibility: "*Where there is danger some Salvation grows there too*" (Hölderlin, *Patmos*, 1990:39). Baudrillard's translators often have this as: "But where there is danger, there grows also what saves" (see for example 1996:49 or 1990b:96). In our technological times, which witness an increased effort to bring about perfection (the perfect crime Baudrillard calls it), he says, "the whole system becomes terroristic" (1996:49). He then argues that we ought to turn these lines of Hölderlin around to read: "But where what saves grows, there also grows danger", which would characterize the much graver threat of disintegration and death represented by our excess of security, prevention, immunity, and the fatal excess of positivity" (1996:49). Once again Hölderlin opens a corridor of poetic resolution for Baudrillard to the suffocating technological tyranny of our time (genetics, cloning, artificial intelligence etc.). It is another opening for Baudrillard's fatal optimism – his belief that as bad as the present system is in its proliferation – it may well collapse under its own weight. This is the only hope Baudrillard has left. As he puts it in the first volume of *Cool Memories*: [before quoting the above passage from Hölderlin in German], "There is much more to be hoped for in an excess of information or of weapons than in the restriction of information or arms control" (1990b:96). Again, in *The Vital Illusion*, we find Hölderlin's idea saving Baudrillard from pessimism:

As a metaphor, I would say that at the core of every human being and every thing there is... a fundamentally inaccessible secret. This is the vital illusion of which Nietzsche spoke, the glass wall of truth and illusion. From our rational point of view, this may appear rather desperate and could even justify something like pessimism. But from the point of view of singularity, of alterity, of secret and seduction, it is, on the contrary, our only chance: our last chance. In this sense, the perfect crime is an hypothesis of radiant optimism. Of course, it is a matter of tragic optimism, as it is expressed in the famous line of Hölderlin: ‘But where danger is, grows the saving power also’. It applies today – with the caveat that, as the evil genius of modernity has changed our destiny, Hölderlin’s phrase must be reversed: ‘the more the saving power grows, the greater the danger’. For we are no longer victims of an excess of fate and danger, of illusion and death. We are victims of an absence of destiny, of a lack of illusion, and consequently of an excess of reality, security, and efficiency (2000:80-81).

Hölderlin provided Baudrillard with the germ of an idea that might be his single greatest thought: reversibility.<sup>6</sup> It is central to what Baudrillard calls “objective irony” – the “strong probability, verging on a certainty, that systems will be undone by their own systematicity” (2000:78). For Baudrillard this applies to both technical and human systems (political, social, economic). The more a system advances toward its perfection, the more they are prone to deconstruct themselves (*Ibid.*).

One of Baudrillard’s more poetic examples of this, for technical systems, is the computer virus: “the tiniest one is enough to wreck the credibility of computer systems, which is not without its funny side” (2002b:6). Baudrillard extends this into his understanding of globalization and the New World Order as reversible: “As Hölderlin said: ‘where danger threatens, that which saves us from it also grows’ – the more the hegemony of the global consensus is reinforced, the greater the risk, or chances it will collapse” (1995:86). That for Baudrillard would be the most poetic resolution of all: “all the philosophies of modernity will appear naïve when compared with the natural reversibility of the world” (1996:10).

*Euphrates’ cities and  
Palmyra’s streets and you  
Forests of columns in the level desert  
What are you now?  
(Hölderlin, *Ages of Life*, 1990:55)*

## VI. Myth versus Sentiment

*And our grief like the troubles of children turns  
Into sleep and just as the breezes  
Flutter and whisper in the strings until  
More adept fingers coax a better music*

*Out of them so mists and dreams play over us.*  
(Hölderlin, *To the Sun God*, 1990:18).

The world's sovereignty resides in the regulated play of signs and appearances (Baudrillard, 1990c:103). ...If the world is what it is, where does the illusion of appearances come from? (2006:94) ... Were it not for appearances the world would be a perfect crime (1996:1).

Baudrillard keeps his distance from sentiment and prefers to see “romantics” like Hölderlin as one of the first great manifestations of nihilism (1994:59). Of our own time he says that we are merely neo-romantic (1990c:102). These assumptions lead Baudrillard to proclaim that “Hölderlin” ... “wasn't a German romantic... he was mythical” (1993:21). In Baudrillard's view this qualifies Hölderlin as a great artist since art, to be art, must be mythical (2001b:142). The mythic Hölderlin is then not someone Baudrillard follows closely, but someone whose fragments play a role in stimulating Baudrillard's thinking in another time. Hölderlin is one important influence, who helps Baudrillard to find a way around what comes after Hölderlin, what Baudrillard calls: “the detour that we have all made through ideology, through radical criticism, through Freud and Marx” (1993:54). Hölderlin thus helps Baudrillard to pass to the horizon of disappearance (which lies beyond the horizon of appearances), and beyond the order of cause and affect. At one point Baudrillard finds himself sounding like Hölderlin concerning the forgetting of the gods, a very central and ironic aspect neo-classicism, which lead to the fallout from so called “Enlightenment” rationality: “The gods have been chased away. Their spectres hover about the deserts of postmodernity. If it took place anywhere, surely the perfect crime had its embodiment here” (1997:147).

## VII. Conclusion

Where shall we rest? (Hölderlin, *The Eagle*, 1990:63).

Philosophy would like to transform the enigma of the world into a philosophical question, but the enigma leaves no room for any question... the enigma of the world remains total (1996b:20).

Friederich Johann Hölderlin played a significant part in Baudrillard's strategy of bringing poetic resolution to the unsatisfactory times in which he found himself. He was one of Baudrillard's inspirations in his struggle against the forces of integral reality (2004:5). In Baudrillard's view, Hölderlin is closer to Heraclitus than Hegel (with whom, in the 1790s, Hölderlin was personally close), and in his writing Baudrillard felt a radical opposition between a poetic, singular configuration, linked to the metamorphosis of forms, as against the kind of virtual reality that is prevalent today. In a poetic approach it is the forms which become – language as the passage of forms – a kind of inhabited void (2004:84).

For Baudrillard, it was not so much a question of following Hölderlin (or Nietzsche or anyone else for

that matter) closely, as it was an effort wherein such thinkers “have to be anagrammatized in what one does” (2004:6). Hölderlin is one of the artists and writers (and there are several: Artaud, Barthes, Bataille, Benjamin, Borges, Brecht, Calvino, Canetti, Heidegger, Heisenberg, Jarry, Lichtenberg, Marx, McLuhan, Nietzsche, Orwell, and Sartre etc.), with whom Baudrillard intersects and in whom he found theoretical inspiration – what he called “another lineage of thought... which comes into play” (2004:10). Baudrillard called Hölderlin’s poetry one of “perpetual becoming”, the poet one who “becomes the theatre of the metamorphosis of rivers, gods, landscapes”. “It is not he who changes,” says Baudrillard, “but the rivers and gods which metamorphose through him” (2004:83). As such, Baudrillard did not find Hölderlin to be “an identitary self” any more than he himself. In any event “identity is a dream pathetic in its absurdity” (1998b:49; 2001:52).

Like Hölderlin, Baudrillard required of the world he wrote that it metamorphosed through him – writing as the theatre of becoming. In this Baudrillard understood the power of language as few (Hölderlin among them) have. Things that “become” are rare (2002c:45). Writing for Baudrillard was a precious “singularity”, “a resistance to real time”, “something that does not conform”, “an act of resistance”, the “invention of an antagonistic world” rather than a “defence of a world that might have existed” (1998b:32 ff.). In Baudrillard’s writing a little something of Hölderlin, anagrammatized, continues.

*And always*

*There is a longing to dissolve*

(Hölderlin, *Mnemosyne*, 1990:49)

...we dream of our disappearance (1987:26). ...There is nothing to say we are not mentally and biologically programmed for an internal disappearance of the same order, as the logical consequences of our power (1997:139).

They may have had a different view of hope but Hölderlin and Baudrillard shared a poetics of absence. It is an absence “which runs beneath the surface of all exchanges” (2001:7) and continually seduces presence (1990d:104). For both it was a deep sensitivity to absence which was so essential to a poetic resolution of the world. Both knew very well from lived experience that theory (as poetry, fiction and fable) precedes the world. “Things appear to us only through the meaning we have given them” (2004:91). For Baudrillard this meant seeking a poetic resolution of the world through the reversible. It kept his wisdom and writing joyful to the end despite everything. It is interesting how significantly Hölderlin is anagrammatized in the writing of a non-romantic who saw himself living in neo-romantic times (1990c:102)

As we struggle to find a use for Baudrillard today we would do well to remember that he wasn’t seeking meaning or truth – but a way of living, writing and thinking through poetic resolution. There, beyond discourses of truth, he found his own way to make the world, which came to him as enigmatic and unintelligible – a little more enigmatic, a little more unintelligible. What he left to us was a gift far more precious than truth – he pointed to its absence.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The translation of the final line is from Michael Hamburger (1994:65).

<sup>2</sup> Or in the arts, which have, arguably, had a greater influence on theory in recent years than have the empirical sciences. See: Gerry Coulter, “A Way of Proceeding: Joseph Beuys, the Epistemological Break, and Radical Thought Today” in *Kritikos: A Journal of Postmodern Cultural Sound, Text, and Image* (May - June, 2008): <http://intertheory.org/gcoulter.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere Baudrillard writes: “The absolute rule is to give back more than you were given. Never less, always more. The absolute rule of thought is to give back the world as it was given to us – unintelligible. And if possible, to render it a little more unintelligible” (*The Perfect Crime*. New York: Verso, 1996:105); and “The world was given to us as something enigmatic and unintelligible, and the task of thought is to make it, if possible, even more enigmatic and unintelligible”. (*Impossible Exchange*. London: Sage, 2001:151).

<sup>4</sup> See Gerry Coulter (2009) [forthcoming]. “Jean Baudrillard’s Karl Marx – Productivist Ideology, And The Future of the Left” in *Fast Capitalism*. [www.fastcapitalism.com](http://www.fastcapitalism.com) [A shorter version of this paper will also appear in Russian translation in the journal *Khora* in early 2009]: <http://jkhora.narod.ru/redeng.html>. Hölderlin also had his idealist period during which he had enormous faith in a corresponding movement of nature, freedom, and society. He was very influential on Hegel’s later thought (which fed into Marxian dialectics). However for Hölderlin, the game was up when Napoleon failed to deliver (in this he was not unlike Beethoven in his own time or, at to some extent, Baudrillard after 1968). See: Eric L. Santner (1990:xiv).

<sup>5</sup> I think it is fair to offer an exemption to Giorgio Agamben here given his hope for a “politics to come”. See Gerry Coulter, “Intersections and Divergences in Contemporary Theory: Baudrillard and Agamben On Politics And the Daunting Questions of Our Time” an Introduction to Giorgio Agamben’s “Form of Life” in the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, Volume 2, Number 2 (July, 2005): [http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol2\\_2/agamben.htm](http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol2_2/agamben.htm)

<sup>6</sup> See Gerry Coulter. “Reversibility – Baudrillard’s ‘One Great Thought’” in *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* (On the Internet), Volume 1, Number 2 (July, 2004): [http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol1\\_2/coulter.htm](http://www.ubishops.ca/BaudrillardStudies/vol1_2/coulter.htm)

# Hypnotist , Philosopher, Serial Killer, Friend: A Critical Review of Ian Brady's *The Gates of Janus*.

By Anthony Metivier

*The Gates of Janus*, a confessional-philosophical book by the British 'Moors Murderer,' Ian Brady, presents one of the very few prose offerings by a "serial killer." Stephen Milligen mentions a manuscript supposedly penned by John Wayne Gacy and submitted to Doubleday titled *A Question of Doubt* (149) but along with Charles Nimo, Milligen doubts that anyone ever actually published the work.<sup>1</sup> Brady's *The Gates of Janus*, in large part, attempts to smash certain cultural illusions about serial killers, while contradictorily arguing for our recognition of the importance, if not necessity, of the serial murderer in contemporary society. In this way, Brady takes the enlightenment of his reader as the goal of his text, and the book functions paradoxically as both an expose and a how-to guide. Nonetheless, Katherine Ramsland dismisses Brady as a "postmodern nihilist" (166). Ramsland, who draws the term "serial killer" back to the beginnings of recorded history, lumps Brady together with several other authors, whom she equally misinterprets. Consider, for example, the connection Ramsland makes between Brady and three major figures of literature and philosophy: "Inspired by Dostoevsky, the Marquis de Sade, and Nietzsche, [Brady] believed that certain men can rise above society's moral standards and do as they pleased" (166-177).

As I will demonstrate, Brady's text deserves greater consideration than this. After all, Brady explains why he thinks people find him repugnant while also finding him attractive and gives us insight, not into what makes a serial killer tick, but into a method of viewing, by which serial killers do not really exist at all. The probing, interrogative nature of Brady's self-study hardly resembles Ramsland's description, and, as we shall see, *The Gates of Janus* weaves an odd array of themes, such as friendship, hypnosis, and representations of the mastermind criminal, which if anything calls for a deconstruction of the myth of the serial killer. Brady's text offers a productive struggle to dismiss the notion of evil as an essence, and *The Gates of Janus* provides a fascinating means of tracking this line of argument in the mind of a controversial criminal.

For Brady, the term 'serial killer' is a misnomer. Moreover, he spots a disconnection between any analysis of a killer's motivation and the actual event or process of killing:



I believe the term ‘serial killer’ is highly misleading, in that it implicitly suggests to the general public that murder is the paramount object or motivating urge in the mind of the killer ... They naturally attribute this motivation partly because they value human life above all else, and partly because, as their endless fascination with the subject suggests, they have a vague conception of murder as being somehow mystical, highly dramatic, or even a nebulously romantic experience, replete with unimaginable connotations of eroticism. And guilt for it must be paid for in full. (85-86)

Generalizing his own experiences and motivations to other killers, Brady argues that murder serves as a cover for the “dramatic” victimizations killers perpetrate upon their victims. Discussing crimes committed by himself and his girlfriend Myra Hindley, Brady asserts that killing and hiding the bodies on the Moors most importantly silenced their prey, thereby preventing any reports of the couple’s crimes. Brady and Hindley made photographs and audio recordings of their abuse of young children as a means of reliving crimes enacted on living bodies. For them, Brady argues, murder itself offered no special excitement. Murder is “a *necessary* conclusion to an exercise of power and will ... a categorical imperative. A wearisome cleaning up after the fear” (89. Brady’s emphasis).

Brady confirms the hypothesis offered by Robert Ressler of the FBI’s Behavioral Sciences Unit, who has been credited with coining the term “serial killer”, “because the behavior of these criminals supposedly reminded him of the movie-house serials he enjoyed as a child” (Milligan 98). Ressler discusses his definition of serial murder, which he first devised and applied in the early 70s (he gives no specific date) in his book *Whoever Fights Monsters*. In short, Ressler argues that the addiction of the serial killer resembles:

the serial adventures we used to see on Saturday at the movies ... Each week you’d be lured back to see another episode, because at the end of each one was a cliff-hanger. In dramatic terms, this wasn’t a satisfactory ending, because it increased, not lessened the tension. The same dissatisfaction occurs in the mind of serial killers. (29-30)<sup>2</sup>

In order to avoid incorrectly associating Brady’s work with Ressler’s theory too closely, and in support of Brady’s fundamental thesis that “serial killers,” strictly speaking, do not exist, we require a longer excursion into the history of the term “serial murder.” David Schmid’s *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* demonstrates that the term “serial murder” and associated terms appeared much earlier than Ressler’s neologism, first in Grierson Dickson’s 1958 study *Murder by Numbers*, and then in the 1966 British edition of John Brophy’s *The Meaning of Murder*. Dickson found “series-murderer” too cumbersome for his purposes and preferred the term “multicide.” Brophy altered the term. “Serial murder,” Brophy felt, described the “essential nature” of the crime (Brophy qtd. in Schmid 71). “Having resolved terminological difficulties to his satisfaction,” Schmid tells us, “Brophy went on to install Jack the Ripper as ‘the most famous of all serial murderers’” (189). As Schmid notes:

Because we have become so used to the idea that the FBI invented and has practically exclusive ownership of the concept “serial murder,” it is surprising to find such a detailed and

carefully articulated discussion of the crime a full decade before the FBI started work on the subject. (71)

While I share Schmid's surprise, and appreciate and recommend his close analysis of the history of this term, I still take Ressler and the FBI's introduction of the term as the key series of moments in which the serial killer entered popular culture. Unlike Schmid, I also deny that Jack the Ripper was a "serial killer" for reasons that I make clear in my comments on the development of the serial killer "genre" in some of my other articles on the serial killer phenomenon. Suffice to say, as Schmid does, the FBI's serial murder investigations:

... did not become well known until October 26, 1983, when the Justice Department held a news conference in Washington, D.C., to "disclose some of the findings from ... preliminary research into ... the problem of 'serial murders,' killings by such people as Jack the Ripper or the Boston Strangler." This news conference is important for two reasons. First, it marks the point when the concept of "serial murder" came to the attention of the public as a whole for the first time. ... Second, the news conference determined that the direction of future public policy and mass media discussions of serial murder would be favorable to the FBI's goals by defining the nature and scope of serial murder in highly specific and partial terms. (77)

The ridiculousness of these "terms," however, demonstrates the mythological extremities of the belief in serial murder. Given some of the figures announced by the FBI and other professionals regarding the activities of so-called serial killers, Schmid calculates that certain "serial killers would have to drive an average of 550 miles a day every single day of the year" (81) and more absurdly, "each killer would have to have murdered an average of 114 people a year" (82).<sup>3</sup>

We need to notice, therefore, that instead of the metaphor of cinema, Brady offers us an allegory that, unlike Ressler's, is structured strictly around substance abuse: "With each subsequent killing, the homicidal drug, blunted by habitual use, creates a diminishing and disappointing impression" (89). Brady leaps between the claim that he murders solely for the purposes of covering up his crimes, and that he suffers from an addictive search for the original "impression" of killing someone. Similarly, Brady warbles inconsistently through pedagogical passages that are aimed at educating the reader about precisely why the public finds him repugnant. On the one hand, Brady's congenial attitude recalls one of the introductory lines in *Child of God*, a novel in which Cormac McCarthy tells us that the serial killer anti-protagonist Lester Ballard "might be a child of God much like yourself perhaps" (4), thereby constructing a consciously unsettling relationship between monstrosity and normalcy. On the other hand, Brady often drops his friendly, explanatory tone in favor of a discursive style that is aimed at establishing the total difference between himself and his reader. For instance, he offers himself as a point of access at certain points in the book, and even uses politically correct gender assignments. Addressing the reader in a non-critical and even kindly manner, Brady says: "You study serial killers not only to understand him/her but also yourselves" (101). On other occasions, however, we hear that serial killers "have their own personal code of ethics and morals, eccentric to the ordinary individual" (64).

Differentiating himself from his audience, Brady virtually erases the dichotomy of good and evil in this short lecture regarding the relationship between killer and detective in crime fiction:

Both protagonists must be ruthless in purpose, astute in deceit, clear in strategy, temper self-confidence with caution; cultivate doubt where there is a certainty and certainty where there is a doubt; feign incompetence to provoke overconfidence; nourish arrogance by fake humility; deny, affirm and divert with dexterity as tactics dictate; incite anger to obtain the unguarded response and sow confusion; exude sympathy for trust while doubting everyone; regard all individuals as essentially corrupt and guided by self-interest; live and breathe moral and legal relativism whilst projecting moral and legal rectitude; and, above all, as already postulated, believe and act in the certainty that the end always justifies the means. (71)

The brutal length of this single sentence, replete with rhetorical inversions and assonance, represents, not so much a further example of Brady's inconsistency, but rather his struggle against the typologies hoisted upon "serial killers." In this regard, Brady reasserts the suggestion of serial killer scholar Elliot Leyton that "the classification of types is a murky form of butterfly collecting" (243). Although Leyton does not discuss Brady in his analysis, it is interesting that Brady directly addresses Leyton's criticism that many academic discussions about serial murder omit the various ways in which police and even psychiatrists resemble the serial killer (113). Brady's speech here links the "skills" of the detective directly with the "skills" of the killer, and one might extend the comparison to the "skills" of the academic.

Brady's insistence on the relation between the professional representative of the state – i.e. the detective – and the supposedly rogue serial killer forms the bulk of his lesson. Brady first defines and then indicts what he calls throughout *The Gates of Janus* the "general public." As a body only vaguely aware of its own uncanny attraction to aggression and murder, the public suffers at the hands of the duplicitously "hypnotic media" (84). The media, Brady argues, has trained the public not to disavow murder and killing, but to admire or express interest only in certain kinds of violence. The mental and spiritual acknowledgment of only a particular few forms of aggression results in the repression of all the others, Brady argues, resulting in a public characterized by unconscious guilt. Brady cites televised news pieces that celebrated the actions of Vietnam pilots as one example of state sanctioned violence. Brady points to the way the public takes great pleasure in the media's revelations of trivial new details about "the bosses of certain extermination camps" (84).

In Brady's view, Serial killers inspire more interest than hired guns because they break the spell of the shared hallucination that privileges some forms of violence while vilifying others. It is from this philosophical notion that Brady draws the title *The Gates of Janus*: both the serial killer and government sanctioned killers emerge from the same "Janus Faced" legal code. While the military officer takes his or her permission to kill from the state, the serial killer takes the designation "serial killer" because of the law that makes transgression possible. However, just as the public may be unaware of the ideological processes directing their repression of murderous impulses, the serial killer may be unaware of how his or her behaviors at once emerge from and illuminate certain legal formulas: "these people kill at will,

requiring no legislation, without asking for or needing permission, the very concept never entering their mind” (84). For this reason, Brady expresses astonishment that governments train civilians rather than hire what Oliver Stone might call “natural born killers” as mercenaries for military purposes (85). However, as Joel Black suggests in *The Aesthetics of Murder* “democratic governments are capable of manipulating news broadcasts in a way that makes state-sanctioned killings appear not only legal but heroic” (23). Brady seems to be responding to a similar sentiment.

### Themes of Friendship in *The Gates of Janus*

If Brady sees murder as nothing more than a way of avoiding capture, how does he view friendship? Brady briefly discusses friendship in *The Gates of Janus* from a biographical perspective. Taking the school system for granted, rather than viewing it as an institution worthy of the same vitriol and vigor he brings to his discussion of the media, Brady sees his youthful triumphs on the playground in terms of personal, inborn talents:

In childhood years I was not the stereotypical ‘loner’ so beloved by the popular media. Friends formed around me eagerly in the school playground, listening to me talk, and I took it as natural. Apparently, I had a descriptive talent and contagious enthusiasm. All harmless, adventurous stuff, no devious intent. No sense of superiority. (92)

While Brady combats the popular, mythical notion of the serial killer as a friendless, distant, and possibly deranged social misfit, he speaks of his personality in terms of nature or essence. In this way, Brady constructs the illusion of normalcy. Brady’s account differs from the publicized accounts of the childhood experiences of serial murders that typically reflect the master narrative popularized by the FBI, the media, and the entertainment industry. For example, in *Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives*, a book that tremendously influenced the theory of criminal profiling, co-authors Robert Ressler, Ann Burgess, and John Douglas present a series of anecdotes crafted from interviews with serial sex offenders. All thirty-six of these narratives hone in on “abnormal” childhood experiences as a means of explaining adult transgressions. The authors comment: “(w)hat is remarkable in the interviews of offenders is an absence of recounting positive childhood fantasies” (35). Discussing one killer in particular, we learn that “Warren (a pseudonym), experienced family role confusion” as a child and as a result “manipulated his family and social system.” (75).

Brady, as we have seen, confidently links his success in the community of his youth with his outgoing personality. Although I maintain that Brady conceives of his “self” as an essence, he does not conceive his “self” as static. Rather, the “ideal Brady” learned by experience, accreting ability and value over time (92). Brady speaks of the formation of his friendships in terms of both unconscious processes and a desire to draw followers who reflected his likeness or essence. However, the production of these relationships always stems from actual social processes:

Gangs formed around me ... I had no conscious sense as to why, only that again, I took it as a natural process. I was not consciously aware of being out to gain followers, but follow they did, obviously predisposed to go where I led. (92)

This “natural” course of action blends Mister Rodger’s thoughts about reciprocation in friendship with the Aristotelian notion of utility. As noted, one of the ways that Brady sees crime, including murder, is as just another form of labor.<sup>4</sup> The friendships he describes reflect this view and rest upon a blend of deviance and the promise of shared economic gain. And yet, despite this focus on purposeful assemblage, Brady attributes the actual, social processes with natural ones:

That our activities became criminal was also accepted as natural. The more money we stole the more fun we had. Only when we were caught by the police did a minority drift away, mainly at the behest of their restrictive parents. I hardly noticed, nor did the remaining others; replacements joined us, and we continued to enjoy the fruits of our activities. (93)<sup>5</sup>

Those who fell away as a result of either parental or police intervention demonstrated that the limits of friendship with Brady hinged upon their usefulness. Moreover, in terms of essences, those capable of replacing the missing friends must have reflected, according to Brady, some quality of their leader. In other words, the interjection of families or the law only served to expose flaws in otherwise well-suited friends because Brady himself operated free from directive forces.

However, Brady would eventually experience the limits of his freedom and see how prison life shapes friendships. First of all, the constrained quarters of a penitentiary offer many of the hallmarks of friendship discussed by Aristotle and many others: shared interests, proximity, and the luxury of time. Colin Wilson, who introduces *The Gates of Janus*, describes one of Brady’s first friendships in incarceration. The following discussion of the never-held chess match between Brady and “Yorkshire Ripper” Peter Sutcliffe touches upon not only friendship, but also the theme of the mastermind criminal:

The press got wind of this and falsely reported that the two notorious killers had played chess together. “Brady Checkmates the Ripper,” took up the whole front page. Sutcliffe stated that Brady had simply asked whether he, Sutcliffe, could play chess and, as he had replied, “Not very well,” no game had taken place and they had simply talked all the time, mostly about cities in the north of England they had both visited and left their mark upon. *The chess gambit had simply been a good story for the newspapers to concoct*,<sup>6</sup> as previous reports on file had accurately stated that Brady had played John Stonehouse (a former British government minister convicted of embezzlement) in the chess final at Wormwood Scrubs in 1979.<sup>7</sup> (6. My emphasis)

The mythical nature of the chess match does not negate the fact that Brady played chess at a nationally recognized level. Rather, the notion of Brady as a chess wizard evokes the image of two antagonists, two mastermind criminals, waging a friendly war. The image implies two grand, transcendent wizards

casually toppling pawns, a continuation of Brady's insistence that the pleasure of murder is contained in the procedures that precede it.<sup>8</sup>

Brady's own description of his meeting with Sutcliffe differs considerably. We detect more of the criminal mastermind in Brady's frustration with the meeting, in which he fantasized about hypnotizing Sutcliffe:

I tried a wide variety of approaches to elicit or evoke a hint of the injured catalyst buried, and in all probability blocked off, deep in his psyche, but with no success. This eventually left me to conclude that probably nothing short of drug-induced hypnosis would be able to extract the fatal secret, if indeed there was one. (159-160)

Brady gives no indication of whether he wanted to expose Sutcliffe's "fatal secret" for the simple pleasure of knowledge, but given the length of his book, we can assume that Sutcliffe's undisclosed thoughts would have appeared in *The Gates of Janus* had Brady obtained them. At the same time, he may well share the "mystical, highly dramatic, or even nebulously romantic" desire for murder trivia he accuses his audience of holding. As we will see shortly, Brady's greatest satisfactions arrive only when he can extract the motives of his serial killer "friends" and develop those motives into a theory of "drives against the norm" (253).

Although Brady did not meet Henry Lee Lucas, we can assume that the FBI authorities expected Brady would take pleasure in lending them his assistance when they requested his "considered opinion of Lucas" (115). As Brady describes the situation, however, the Moors murderer sought to turn the opportunity to his own advantage. Brady recounts telling the officers "that it would help considerably if I could see or hear Lucas confessing" (115). In one sense, both the killer and the police sought satisfaction for similar needs: knowledge, insight, and a greater understanding of crime. A similar situation arose between Ted Bundy and King County police authorities during the "Green River Killings" in the Seattle, Washington area. According to A&E's *Cold Case Files*, a television documentary about Gary Ridgeway – who eventually pled guilty to this set of crimes – Bundy gave the police solid advice. In one recorded interview, for instance, Bundy advises: "the best chance you have of catching this guy red-handed, is to get a site with a fresh body and stake it out." Although Ridgeway later confessed that he did indeed revisit his dump sites for the purpose of sex with the corpses, police did not immediately take Bundy's advice.

The important point here is that the relationship forged between the killer and the investigative team often revolves around utility and pleasure. In an interview featured in the A&E special, King County Sheriff Dave Reichert explains:

Part of the reason that I think he wanted to talk to us is that these personalities like to be the center of attention, and he'd been in prison for awhile and what was happening here in Washington was drawing attention away from his cases and his legacies, so to speak.

The documentary then cuts almost seamlessly to the voice of Criminologist Bob Keppel: "Of course his

ego is boosted by this. I mean it's a way for Ted Bundy to maintain his significance and feel important."

While the documentary explicitly frames the "facts" so that it appears that Bundy contacted the authorities, and that the investigative team used this opportunity to "pick his brains," the 2004 television movie, *The Riverman*, about Bundy's assistance with the "hunt for clues" clearly takes its cues from Thomas Harris' and Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*. The situation presented in the A&E documentary is depicted here as a game of *quid pro quo*, with Bundy offering information in exchange for the possibility of a stay of execution and other small favors. In both the A&E documentary and *The Riverman*, we see Bundy represented as an opportunist who "liked to talk about murder" and used the investigation for his own purposes. As well, both the documentary and the film portray the investigate team as tainted by their engagement with Bundy; the "usefulness" of Bundy's contribution is downplayed. In fact, in the documentary, Keppel states that they asked Bundy the same questions they would have asked him about his own crimes, and thereby learned about two crimes at once.

For his part, Brady labels his relationship with the FBI a "charade" (117) and relates no particular feeling of reciprocation. Brady's account of his friendship with John Wayne Gacy is more promising. Although he does not specify how he made Gacy's acquaintance, he explicitly states that he "had personal contact with Gacy and we shared mutual friends" (119). For Brady, Gacy stands out from the group of acquaintances that Brady represents as a sprawling network of admirers. In Brady's view, Gacy was capable of "breathing life into ideas ... creating an organic structure" and "enacting a hypothesis, which, if believed in, should then be taken under personal ownership and expanded into whatever avenues of action the belief indicates" (257). Here we sense the classical conception of a friendship of virtue, in which one party not only mirrors the other, but also offers the other opportunities for self-improvement. Brady admired Gacy for his extra-curricular activities as well. Comparing Gacy's numerous performances to that of a clown at a gathering for children, Brady argues that "there is no reason to suppose that [Gacy's] charitable activities were not genuinely altruistic" (119). Brady praises Gacy as the bearer of virtues to which, he recommends, we should all aspire.

In the final analysis, Brady challenges the popular perception of the friendless serial killer. If we are to take Brady at his word, the sense of personal refinement he experienced through his relationship with John Wayne Gacy push his socially, critically and philosophically provocative position – that murder can be a "lucrative and exciting form of illegal self-employment" (53) – into interesting waters. After all, Brady takes the betterment of his readers as a prime directive. Although he moves between passages of vertiginous philosophy and buttery braggadocio, the overarching purpose of *The Gates of Janus* is pedagogical. Brady identifies the social understanding of serial murder as a failure, and offers his book as a correction; not merely for shock value, or for the continued victimization of those affected by his crimes, but for the purposes of illuminating the not- so-mysterious mysteries of his murderous behavior in a world structured by social processes rather than essences. Like a professional scholar, Brady contributes to existing knowledge by packaging his ideas in the form of a book and publishing it. Ironically, this process reflects one of the main social crimes that Brady rails against, i.e. the "officially sanctioned crimes of capitalist free- enterprise" (53). Nevertheless, his writing instantiates that which he claims to be the true purpose of

the serial murderer. The authentic killer (i.e. Brady) is someone who:

Would much rather inflict *life* than death upon the victims, so that he might savor the knowledge that the victim has been forced to suffer the memory of the ordeal for the rest of his/her days. (90)

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<sup>1</sup> "Four Visits to John Wayne Gacy." <http://user.aol.com/Karol666/page4/gacy.htm>.



<sup>2</sup> Fascinatingly, Ressler's cinematic suppositions contributed to Thomas Harris' *The Silence of the Lambs* (Schmid 93), and he served as a supervisor for the television show *Profiler* (172). Schmid discusses Ressler's various condemnations of filmic representations of the FBI and demonstrates how the Ressler's opinion hinges on whether or not the filmmakers sought his advice. He approved of Harris' novel, for instance, but not Jonathan Demme's film, which did not utilize his expertise (93).

<sup>3</sup> In *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything*, Steven Levitt and co-author Stephen Dubner present a similar case in which advocate for the homeless Mitch Snyder provided figures, which when calculated, suggested that "45 homeless people die each second – which would mean a whopping 1.4 billion dead homeless each year" (90). For Levitt and Dubner, this architecture of "conventional wisdom" occurs because of the incentives that journalists and experts offer one another: "Everyday there are newspaper pages and television newscasts to be filled, and an expert who can deliver a jarring piece of wisdom is always welcome" (91).

<sup>4</sup> Although we need not necessarily take Brady at his word on this point, he does directly contradict the link between himself and the characters who "kill for pleasure" in both Anthony Burgess' and Stanley Kubrick's versions of *A Clockwork Orange* in online serial killer lore. *Tookeys Film Guide*, for instance, claims that Kubrick's film "remains one of the clearest expression of the Sixties belief in 'doing your own thing' that spawned Charles Manson, Ian Brady and many, many others" (<http://www.christookey.com/devFilm.asp?ID=2932>). For a more objective association between Brady and *A Clockwork Orange*, see Alex Burns review of *The Gates of Janus* on the disinformation website (<http://www.disinfo.com/archive/pages/article/id1861/pg1/index.html>).



<sup>5</sup> This way of framing the situation recalls Augustine's theft of the pears with his gang of friends, although in Augustine's case, the episode results in a confession of guilt most certainly structured around the fruit of knowledge and the resulting punishment in The Book of Genesis. All the same, Augustine's break with his friends comes not from any social intervention, as it did with Brady, but from Augustine's self-revelation that his friendships did not satisfy his spirit.

<sup>6</sup> I italicize this line in order to address a characteristic trivialization of the victims. Nowhere in Wilson's introduction do we hear anything about those killed by Brady and his partner.

<sup>7</sup> A play titled *Crackdown* performed at the Norwich Arts Center on 26 April 2008 mentions Brady's involvement in the tournament.

<sup>8</sup> Brady mentions one other friendship organized around chess with serial killer Graham Young against whom he apparently played prior to entering prison (125). The online Crime Library highlights "their shared fascination with Nazi Germany. " ([http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial\\_killers/weird/graham\\_young/11.html/](http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/weird/graham_young/11.html/)). The Boston Strangler, one of Brady's friends on Myspace.com posts the image of a chess board for Brady and discusses the game in Brady's comment area (<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendID=270534940>). Although it is unlikely that either Brady or The

Boston Strangler hold Myspace accounts, the instance foregrounds the importance of chess between even fictional serial killing friends:

<p><b>Boston Strangler</b> Dec 10 2007 3:42 AM</p>  	<p><b>Boston Strangler</b> Dec 5 2007 11:13 PM</p> <p>Oh yeah chess is one of my favorites. Dont know if Im that good but Id give it a go. Our new comrade from Russia sure does. Have you got wind of him ? The "Bitskyevskei Maniac" or the "Chessboard killer". Tryin to kill 64 people for every square on the board. Im sure you..ve heard. Anyways I hope its check and then checkmate for you next time I catch you on. See ya round - Al</p>
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# Engendering War in Hanan Al Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*

By Isam M. Shihada

## 1. Introduction

The urgency to retrieve memory in many Arab women's writings becomes the impetus to retell the stories of women silenced, marginalized, and excluded by their own communities. There is no doubt that with the retrieval of memory comes the resituating of the body from its condition as an object of male desire, and "its transformation into a desiring force that rejects its subjugation to a narrative of erasure" (Fayad 148).<sup>1</sup> Hanan Al Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*<sup>2</sup> is divided into two books. The first book is entitled "The Scars of Peace". In it we find the central female character, Zahra, is silently victimized by the patriarchal structure through its variously ugly manifestations. The second book is subtitled "The Torrents of War". Here we find a completely different character, one who is ready to do anything to stop the war, even if it takes a relationship with a sniper – a symbol of patriarchal war – which ends in her tragic death.

## 2. Engendering War in Hanan Al Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra*

My argument is that women are victimized by both patriarchy and war, and the futility of deconstructing the concept of war from within the isolation of patriarchy. For example, Zahra's father is portrayed as a patriarchal tyrant to his wife, Fatme and daughter Zahra, who is ever fearful of him: "(a)ll I knew was that I was afraid of my father, as afraid of the blows he dealt her as I was of those he dealt me; while she continued to tremble and wail in his grip"(15). The attention lavished on Zahra's brother Ahmad as a child reflects the masculine ideals of the patriarchy and the strength of its grip on society. Zahra remembers the behavior of her mother towards her brother.

Everyday, as we sat in the kitchen to eat, her love would be declared: having filled my plate with soup she serves my brother Ahmad, taking all her time, searching carefully for the best pieces of meat. She dips the ladle into the pot and salvages meat fragments. There they go into Ahmad's dish. (11)

Such a masculine mentality continues to manifest itself later in the book, in Ahmad's addiction to hashish,

masturbation, and goods stripped from the bodies of the dead.

Zahra recounts how her own face and her inner psyche become scarred as a result of her society's descent into the abyss of war. In Zahra's early years, we also observe that her brutal father rejected her because she had acne, a symbol of her inner scars. Within this context, Ann Adams elaborates further how the conflicts in Zahra's home truly register on her body: "Zahra's abject and acne-filled face not only makes visible the emotional scars this upbringing has had on the sensitive young girl, but also literalizes the ever increasing gender conflict carried on in society – the 'battle' between men and women for the control and regulation of female bodies" (201). It is a problem that Zahra's father thinks might make of her a spinster with no marriage prospects. This drives him to beat and abuse her mercilessly every time he sees her fingering her pimples.

He would scold me severely whenever he caught me playing with my pimples....My father would go raving mad every time he noticed my face and its problems .He would nag my mother sarcastically : " That will be the day when Zahra married. What a day of joy for her and her pock-marked face! (24-5)

Zahra's father's cruel behavior succeeds only in intensifying Zahra's sense of isolation in a patriarchal society in which she feels discriminated against, unwanted and unloved by the people closest to her. It also reinforces to some degree the patriarchally constructed notions of beauty and idealised femininity.<sup>3</sup> Resisting these patriarchal notions of beauty, Zahra starts a process of self-mutilation, a symbol of her rejection of her society and its conventions. With her nails, Zahra intentionally disfigures her face until the blood starts to ooze from her pimples to such extent that it has become her only reason for waking up early each morning: "(m)y pimples were my only reason for waking each morning. I would hurry to the mirror to inspect in the calm light of day the ravages of the latest onslaught" (24). Within this context, John Knowles comments that Zahra's face is no longer part of her but is metonymic of society, "In aggressing her skin, she is, in effect, indirectly repudiating all the unrealistic and procrustean molds in which commodified women are forced to fit."(15). In other words, through her silent resistance, Zahra rejects the criteria by means of which women's value is measured and assessed as only sexual objects.

Al Shaykh portrays how Zahra continues resisting the oppressive patriarchal system through sheltering in silence, as seen in the first part of the novel. The bathroom becomes her only safe haven from the suffocating society she lives in. For example, Zahra locks herself in bathrooms either in Beirut or Africa whenever she encounters the psychological and mental pressures imposed on her by her tyrannical father, her uncle, and her husband. Concerning her uncle who lives in exile in Africa, his idealistic notion of his homeland, Lebanon, has come to him in the form of Zahra.<sup>4</sup> We find that Zahra's arrival in the country of her uncle's exile represents "a direct contact with that which he misses the most, and from the outset he clings to it with all his being." (Allen 245). This is seen in the way he gives Zahra his bed while sleeping on the couch, and how he comes every morning to awaken her. He is desperate for her attention and often hugs her in away that makes Zahra feel very uncomfortable, bringing back all the painful memories of her past. Zahra wishes she could break her own silence and tell him how she truly feels.

Uncle , please tell me why you have stretched out by my side . ‘Oh, how I wish could have said those words! ‘Uncle, if you could hear the beat of my heart, if you could only see the disgust and fury gathered in my soul. If only you know what my true feelings were. I am at my wits’ end, and am annoyed with myself and hate myself because I stay silent. When will my soul cry out like a woman surrendering to a redeeming love? (34)

These words reveal Zahra’s inner self and her desperate search for her own identity. But instead of voicing her anger against her uncle, Zahra retreats silently to the bathroom. “I went into the bathroom and heard myself thinking ‘There is no parting from you, bathroom. You are the only thing I have loved in Africa. You, and the electrical appliances stacked on the shelves” (27).

While locking herself in the bathroom, Zahra remembers her first, ungratifying sexual experience with Malek, a married colleague in the government tobacco factory. Haunted by her painful past from which, she thought, that Africa could be her haven, Zahra narrates: “(n)ow I am in Africa because I want to be far from Beirut” (29). But unfortunately, she encounters the harsh reality again when faced with Majed’s marriage proposal, which leads her to another psychological break down, and an inability to face her husband-to-be as a non-virgin. “What was I to do with my life after Africa? Where would I go? The day must come when I marry and my husband discovers that I am no longer a virgin, that I have undergone two abortions” (29).<sup>5</sup>

Zahra’s husband turns out to be a crude man who marries Zahra in order to be “the owner of a woman’s body that I could make love to whenever I wished ... I have married Hashem’s niece and so fulfilled the dream I’ve had ever since being in the South ... of marrying the daughter of an illustrious family” (83). He is completely oblivious to the fact that Zahra craves to assert her own identity and freedom: “I wanted to live for myself. I wanted my body to be mine alone. I wanted the place on which I stood and the air surrounding me to be mine alone and no one else’s” (93). When her husband finds out that Zahra is no longer a virgin, he goes into a fit, feeling his honor and pride deeply wounded: “I thanked God that my mother was far away, far from this mess, and couldn’t ask to see these stained sheets so that she might display them to Zahra’s mother, to the neighbors and relatives. I thanked God for my mother’s absence, and with it her stinging tongue” (86). It is apparent that he sees Zahra merely as a sexual commodity of which he is the sole proprietor. He does not even care about creating a true exchange of love and true, genuine feelings that could have saved her from breaking down again (Accad :1990). Furthermore, Africa may be a political haven for Hashem and other dissidents who live in exile, and may represent economic opportunities for youths like Majed,<sup>6</sup> but there is no refuge for women who try to escape their oppressive, patriarchal families and their painful pasts. For Zahra, Africa becomes Lebanon since the patriarchal values that are meant to oppress women have been transported there intact. Both her uncle and husband “fail to acknowledge Zahra as an individual with her own personal needs”(Adams 201).

Once Zahra is back to Beirut – in the second part of the novel, “The Torrents of War” – she falls into a severe depression manifested in her withdrawal symptoms and over- eating, which develops into a form of complete despair and sickness:

My deep sleeping was sickness, my increasing weight, my wearing only my housecoat for two months on end were sickness. The scabs on my face that spread to my neck, to my shoulders, and my not caring about them were a sickness. My silence was a sickness. My mother would launch into a tirade whenever she saw me in my housecoat during those two months, but I stayed completely silent. (126)

But with the advent of the war, her attitude changes drastically as she begins to follow the news of the war.

Reading nervously but eagerly between the lines in the newspapers, searching for the truth. Then I would overflow with despair and disbelief. All those figures which listed the numbers killed, could they be possible? Were there truly these kidnappings? Did they actually check your identity card and then, on the basis of your religion, either kill you or set you free? Were the young people who fought in the war receiving orders from their leaders, and were they wearing combat clothes? Was it true that the Rivoli Cinema had been burnt down? Was it true about the fire in the Souk Sursok?. And the one in Souk Al-Tawile? Had George, the hairdresser, our neighbor, turned against me? Had I turned against him? (129)

Al Shaykh tries to subvert the patriarchal idea of war by throwing light on women's participation in putting an end to it.<sup>7</sup> For example, we see that Zahra is no longer confined to the safety of the bathroom but instead "finds that she can inhabit other spaces and move beyond the narrow life-style of her mother. While others cower in fear, Zahra rushes into the midst of the turmoil." (Adams 201). War jolts her back to life and forces her to act; she volunteers for a short time at a casualty ward, which gives her a deeper insight into the gruesome realities of war.

I wondered whether the leaders of the factions ever visited hospitals, and if they did, even for an hour, how they could live an ordinary day again? Could they stop themselves thinking of an amputated leg? Or of an eye that had turned to liquid? Or of a severed hand lying there in resignation and helplessness? Why did none of those leaders, as they stood listening to the groans, pledge to put a stop to the war and cry out, "This war shall end! I shall finish it! No cause can be won until the war is stopped. No cause comes before the cause of humanity and safety. The war ends here and now! (135)

Zahra tries to understand the real reasons behind the cruel war and its validity, and the urgent necessity of acting to stop the complete madness. Undoubtedly, her reflections on the cruelty of war pose serious questions about the role of women in stopping war and what strategies should be adopted in this regard.<sup>8</sup> In her continuous attempts to stop the war, Zahra tries to prevent the shooting of prisoners taken from the Christian side by asking the militiaman she knows to let them go free. But her parents, afraid for her life, drag her back home where she sits weeping: "I sat on, punishing myself, feeling guilty for all the times when I had felt uncomfortable before the war, and for all the misery which I had thought was misery before the war, and the pain I had thought was pain before the war" (114). In this context, Wafa Stephen has commented on the constructive role of women during war: "women have tried to appease the fighters by

paying visits to refugee camps and military headquarters and putting flowers in the nozzles of guns” (3).

War puts every fact of life into question. Zahra and her mother clutch one another during successive bouts of street fighting among Lebanese factions, which makes Zahra close to her mother again like “the orange and navel.”

My mother and I shouted out together as if we were once again as close as orange and navel, as we had been when we stood trembling behind the door, back in my earliest memories. Now she moved across from one corner to the other room as the room was lit up by explosions. We crawled down to the basement, the noise all the while moving closer until it was as though it had its source inside my head. Before I could cry out, an explosion had burst near-by and my heart had dropped between my feet. I was left completely empty, except for my voice, but even this I could not control any more. I lifted my head and saw my mother crying like a child, hiding her face in her hands, unable to move an inch. (136)

War has drawn them closer than before since they are horrified by its barbaric face. For instance, both shout upon seeing a newspaper photograph of a whole family killed while playing cards, “still clutching the cards in their hands, the shrapnel mingling with parts of their bodies, everything else looking normal, children’s underwear still hanging in the room” (136). These days make Zahra remember her childhood relationship with her mother and how “she wanted to draw her towards me, to draw myself close to her, to touch her face and have her eyes peering into mine. I wanted to disappear into the hem of her dress and become even closer to her than the navel is to the orange!” (8). But in spite of Zahra’s closeness to her mother, her feelings towards her are contradictory. Zahra, in her early childhood, was constantly hurt by her mother’s abandonment of her every time a man came along: “(t)he man became the centre of her life, and around him was nothing but flying embers” (8-9). Zahra also remembers how her mother used to take her along to conceal her love affairs, resenting the fact that she had been used to deceiving her father, leading to her mixed feelings of love and hatred toward her mother – “I no longer knew what my feelings were, to whom I owed loyalty”(15). Within this context, Roger Allen comments “(w)hen a young girl growing up in a thoroughly traditional, male-dominated society is presented with a model of maternal love that is so fraught with conflicting ideals and emotions, it is hardly surprising that she should be somewhat disturbed” (332). And this may account for Zahra’s inability to build trust in her mother and belief in women’s togetherness where men “seem to matter much more than women. This could be what leads her to madness and death in the end” (Accad 45-6).

Al-Shaykh deconstructs the masculine idea of war by exposing its ugly side and how it affects the social fabric in a disastrous way. For example, we see that war has transformed Ahmad from the time he was a boy whose father wanted to send him to America – “(m)y father’s one dream was to save enough money to send my brother Ahmad to the United States to study electrical engineering” (25) – into an uncivilized militiaman who feels tremendous pride in raiding people’s homes to loot, desecrate and destroy. “Ahmad had begun to return with other things apart from his rifle and his joints of hashish. He would try to conceal these objects behind his back as he went across the living room and into our parent’s bedroom.”(169). For

Ahmad, killing means masculinity<sup>9</sup> – at least he is not like a woman, sitting at home. Ahmad comes to symbolize “the petulant and domineering attitudes within the society that, having helped engender the war, now sustain it” (Allen 1995: 239). War has given him power over the others and a way to gain money by robbing and looting. He is even worried about the end of the war, which would mean an end to the twisted identity that the war has bestowed on him.

I don't wish for the war to end. I don't want to have to worry about what to do next. The war has structured my days and nights, my financial status, my very self. It has given me a task that suits me, especially since those first months when I was so nervous and afraid. Once those first months were over I became like the cock of the roost (168).

Ahmad's words reflect the way in which war has given him and his comrades an occupation “that they did not have before and without which they would not know what to do” (Accad 1990: 53). He is proud to belong to the patriarchal system and embraces its masculine values.

Al-Shaykh also portrays how war has brought out the disintegration of Lebanese society, which motif is manifested in the use of drugs, the loss of moral values, and the disruption of traditional institutions. In regard to drugs, Ahmad talks proudly about the legitimacy of using drugs during the war.

Drugs have given the war on a new dimension. I can't really explain it. They help you see the war through a filter that screens the eyes...it cancels out the guns, the rockets, the firing, even though we go on fighting, and if I asked myself what I have accomplished, I answer that I have obeyed my commander's orders and achieved much. I have not stayed at home with the women. (168)

Concerning loss of moral values, Zahra is shaken by Ahmad's audacity in masturbating in her presence. She wonders how war could have changed moral values to such an extent that everything has become permissible during the war.

I looked up to see him touching himself. I could not say why I should be so upset. How was it that the war had changed things to this extent: that Ahmad could sit and fondle himself without a thought for my presence as if he were on his own. Oh, war! ... Ahmad, you sit in the next room, fondle your genitals and inhale hashish. You smoke grass and fondle your groin, and can only come back to being yourself after you have killed and robbed, hated and fled. (164)

Zahra is able to criticize the decay of moral values and hold herself apart from the patriarchal system so that she can develop values of peace, tolerance and equality. She is also aware that war is a male activity and that women are the ultimate victims of its horror. Within this context, Virginia Woolf argues,

women 's exclusion from patriarchal traditions makes them uniquely free of the greed and egotism fostered by those traditions and more willing to criticize them; denied the economic



and social rewards for aggression and greed granted to men, women are freer to develop values necessary for peace such as cooperation, equality, and creativity. (1966: 56)

War also suspends Zahra's father's oppressive, patriarchal role, which has receded into the background.<sup>10</sup> He leaves the wounded Beirut, returning with his wife to their ancestral village, apparently still untouched by the war. They leave behind Zahra, who would not otherwise have been allowed to live on her own, without the oppression of patriarchal convention: "(m)y father turned to face us, and I had never seen him so feeble. He could hardly speak for weakness as his head went on shaking and he tried to persuade Ahmad to leave everything and go with us to the village" (139). Even her father's belt no longer carries any threat for Zahra as the war has made it completely powerless (173). It is the same belt that had beaten her mother and instilled fear in Zahra.

War disrupts traditional institutions. Such disruption of the entrenched moral order affords Zahra some breathing space. Zahra moves into a house of her own and is able to channel her energy into her own survival. Within this new space created by war, Zahra's formidable energies are channeled into affirming a new set of humanistic values that enable her to resist the law of the jungle, represented by Ahmad and his generation. Her deep indignation with her brother's speech and his stolen goods is clearly expressed: "I covered my ears with my hands and screamed, 'Stop telling me any of these things!' and took refuge, crying in my room" (170).

Zahra's complex relationship with the sniper is meant to stop the war even as it makes use of the language of seduction. For Zahra, if she is unable to stop war and death, at least she can defer it by creating new values of love, mutual coexistence and tolerance. Every time she sees the sniper, she wonders

What could possibly divert the sniper from aiming his rifle and startle him to the point where he might open his mouth instead? Perhaps a troupe of dancers would do it? Or Perhaps a gypsy with a performing monkey? Or perhaps a naked woman, passing across his field of fire? May be if such a sight crossed his vision he would pause for just one moment and wonder whether the world had indeed gone mad in the midst of this war. (157)

Walking topless in front of the sniper is Zahra's attempt to distract him from his fatal job. Put differently, Zahra makes it her moral duty to come to the sniper and communicate with him sexually and verbally, hoping that such forms of communication might alleviate some of the gruesome facts of the war and heal the wounds of her shattered and wounded country. In her relationship with the sniper, we find Zahra using her body language to humanize this "monster" – "I had given him my body, my chance of life or death" (152) – asking herself endless questions, trying to understand what makes a sniper a sniper, to such extent that it becomes the meaning she craves to find in her life. "What had made him into a sniper? Who had given him orders to kill anonymous passers-by?" (154).

Zahra's body, ravaged by her painful past, is now used creatively for a meaningful purpose. She experiences ecstasy for the first time, something that she lacked in her previous, traditional relationships with

Malek and her husband Majed: “What, now, had become of me? Crying out, lying on dusty floor tiles in an abandoned building, breathing the air’s fear and sadness, my lord and master a god of death who had succeeded in making my body tremble with ecstasy for the first time in thirty years” (154). Here, a new purpose has rejuvenated her, and peace has descended on Zahra for the first time, even to the extent of contemplating marriage with the sniper, the only man who has accepted her as an equal. “My one wish is for the war to end so we can make our bed elsewhere. I wish to marry and take this sniper for my husband. I wish to stay with him for ever, but cannot live with him unless we are married.” (173).

The bodily exchange between Zahra and the sniper is a symbol of Zahra’s faith in peace and the values of humanity. Her desperate attempt to stop the war by giving her body and soul to the sniper is seen as instrument of empowerment. Through it, Zahra is able to advocate a more humane, peaceful and less barbaric society than that governed by the oppressive patriarchal ideology that destroys any hope for a better future for women. She contemplates meeting the sniper to discuss their future marriage once the war is over:

Tomorrow, when I see him again, I will speak frankly. We will discuss everything concerning sniping and marriage. Tomorrow will decide my future. There is nothing I don’t want to know. I am impatient to know everything. Tomorrow will decide my future. There is nothing I don’t want to know. I am impatient to know everything. Tomorrow will decide my life. (174)

At the end of the novel, Zahra informs the sniper that she is pregnant, which generates a masculine response from him – “My God, Zahra. You must get an abortion!” (203). Her lover shortly changes his stance and assures her that that he will marry her. “Tomorrow morning. I’ll call at your home and bring my family” (210). The thought of legitimacy and hope makes Zahra believe that the war has ended and it is time to build a new future: “It begins to occur to me that the war with its miseries and destructiveness, has been necessary for me to start to return to being normal and human” (161).<sup>11</sup> But it seems that her feeling is not meant to last. She feels an excruciating pain and finds herself lying in the street with blood draining from her body.

The pain is terrible, but I grow accustomed to it, and to the darkness. As I close my eyes for an instant, I see the stars of pain. Then there are rainbows arching across white skies. He kills me. He kills me with bullets that lay at his elbow as he made love to me. He kills me, and the white sheets that covered me a little while ago are still crumpled from my presence. Does he kill me because I’m pregnant? Or is it because I asked him whether he was a sniper? It’s as if someone tugs at my limbs. Should I call out one more time, ‘Please help!’ (214)

Zahra’s tragic death at the end of the book can be seen as proof that war has not swept clear the traditional, patriarchal forces that legitimate all that oppresses women: “(t)he war has swept everything away, for the rich and for the poor, for the beautiful and for the ugly. It has kneaded everything together into a common dough” (184). This may be why Al Shaykh has to situate the sexual encounters between Zahra and the sniper on the stairs of an abandoned building, haunted by the smell of death – “lying on dusty floor tiles in an abandoned building” (154) – which indicates the futility of this relationship, which is doomed, killing

any hope for new life.

### 3. Conclusion

To conclude, Zahra is victimized both by patriarchy and by war. Zahra falls to the same patriarchal structures, now in a form of the sniper, which had caused her pain in her youth. She had falsely thought that war, in spite of its ugly side, could be a new beginning, the start of a healthy and normal life. In *The Story of Zahra*, Al Shaykh has articulated an empowering discourse for women. That is seen through Zahra's life from her silence to her determined pursuit of meaningful action, far away from any limited political affiliation, to put an end to this barbaric war. *The story of Zahra* registers women's rejection of the discourse of war and the patriarchy that engenders it. Zahra, a silenced, oppressed woman, casts off these constraints and asserts her right to speak out against the dominant patriarchal order. In this regard, Accad says, "both women and men should work together towards a reformed nationalism striped of its male chauvinism, war and violence" (1990:26). Hence, without the deconstruction of patriarchy and its ugly manifestations, any attempt to stop it will be a feeble endeavor, done within the oppressive patriarchy, as seen in Zahra's final tragic death.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Zahra's actions on behalf of humanity and civilized values symbolize a humanistic statement in advocacy of peace, love, and tolerance.<sup>13</sup>

### Notes.

1. Mona Fayad observes that, "aware that such a process of mythification places Woman outside the movement of history, Arab women writers have developed a number of strategies to produce a counter-discourse to such a historical representation. One such strategy is a move to reclaim history and specificity." (147. Nawal al-Saadawi also stresses this point when she calls for a re-reading of Arab history from the viewpoint of Arab women so they can be aware that the struggle of Arab women against sexual, national, and class oppression is not newly born, and that the Arab women's movement doesn't come from the void, and is not modeled on women's movements in the West, but is evident throughout the course of Arab and Islamic history, extending over fourteen centuries. See Saadawi, *Towards a Strategy for Incorporating and Integrating Arab Women in the Arab Nationalist Movement* 471-91.

2. All references will be henceforth taken from Al- Shaykh, Hanan. *The Story of Zahra*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.

3. Within this context, Evelyne Accad says that *The Story of Zahra's* "explicit sexual descriptions, its exploration of taboo subjects such as family cruelty and women's sexuality and its relation to the war, caused such a scandal that the book was banned in several Arab countries." (1990: 44-5:). Larson adds that Hanan Al Shaykh's bold depiction of a Muslim family with no "sense of cohesiveness" (14) is the primary

reason for the novel having been banned in several Islamic countries.

4. See Walther, “Out of Sight: Toni Morrison’s Revision of Beauty Black American Literature Forum” and Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*.

5. Radhakrishnan presents the dichotomy of nationalist rhetoric as based on an inside/outside opposition that is translated into gendered terms, in which nationalist rhetoric makes “‘woman’ the pure and a historical signifier of ‘interiority’”, with interiority assuming an essential identity that constitutes “tradition” (77-95). Partha Chatterjee also criticizes critiques the notion of scientific rationalism as reinforcing the dichotomy traditional/modern, and thereby placing the discourse of nationalism within the Western Enlightenment discourse. See Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. London: Zed, 1986.

6. Evelyne Accad observes that “(o)ne of the codes of Arab tribes is *sharaf* (honor), which also means the preservation of girls’ virginity to ensure that the women are kept exclusively for the men of their tribe.” (29).

7. Several West African nations house very large Lebanese communities. In the Ivory Coast, for example, “80 per cent of the buildings belong to Lebanese, as well as more than 70 per cent of the wholesale and 50 per cent of the retail trade.” Even more significantly, in the context of this novel, “since large-scale fighting broke out in Lebanon in 1975, ‘other’ Lebanese have arrived here ... Some of them give the impression of coming here for a rest between spells of fighting in Beirut. They’re terribly arrogant.” See “The Ivory Coast’s Lebanese Scapegoats Face Hostility”, *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 25 Mar. 1990.

8. In her protest against war, Virginia Woolf says, “(w)e daughters of educated men are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed. The one shuts us up like slaves in a harem, the other forces us to circle, like caterpillars head to tail, round and round the mulberry tree, the sacred tree, of property. The question we put to you, lives of the dead, is how can we enter the professions and yet remain civilized human beings; human beings that is, who wish to prevent war?” (1966: 39).

9. Judith Stiehm notes that “too often peace activists find themselves protesting wars already in progress or peace agreements already signed. The reports describe efforts to institutionalize women’s role in international peacemaking and building. Insuring presence is preemptive and almost certainly advantageous. Unfortunately, women have not yet developed the kind of strategic thinking about peace that men daily and at great expense devote to war (2003: 1232 ).

10. Cynthia Enloe observes that the military has a special role in the ideological construction of patriarchy because of the significance of combat in the construction of masculine identities and in the justification of masculine superiority. Paul Higate says that militaries are perceived as masculine institutions not only

because they are populated mostly with men but also because they constitute a major arena for the construction of masculine identities. See *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*. To read more about masculinity and the men who wage war, please see Carol Cohen, "A Conversation with Cynthia Enloe: Feminists Look at Masculinity and the Men Who Wage War." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* .28:4 2003. 1188-1207.

11. Nadine Puechguirbal comments on how war affect women and temporarily suspend patriarchal structures. She writes, "(t)oday between 60 and 80 percent of women are single heads of households .Shortages of food, wood, water, and health care have created great burdens for them. Women and girls often have to travel long distances to find resources, inadvertently exposing themselves to violence by thugs roaming the countryside." (2003: 1273).

12. Meredith Turshen writes that "(w)ar also destroys the patriarchal structures of society that confine and degrade women. In the very breakdown of morals, traditions, customs, and community, war also opens up and creates new beginnings" (1998: 20).

13-In this regard, Miriam Cooke says that the war had opened up new vistas, but within its own logic. It could not yet be used to transcend it. Sherrill Whittington argues that it is essential that the principle of gender equality and nondiscrimination be mainstreamed into all policies and programs. United Nations peacekeeping operations must guarantee that the protection of women's human rights is central to allocations that promote peace, implement peace agreements, resolve conflict and reconstruct war-torn societies.

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# Research Proposal and Thesis Writing: Narrative of a Recently Graduated Researcher in Applied Linguistics.

By Joseph Benjamin Afful

## 1 Introduction

In the last two and half decades, various disciplinary and organizational studies across the world have demonstrated a growing interest in narrative. As a fundamental form of human expression through which individuals are able to make sense of themselves, their lives, and events (Gergen, 1994; Hanninen, 2004), narratives construct a spatio-temporal context that assists in meaning-making. In particular, referring to narratives in organizational studies, Boyce (1995) posits that narratives constitute symbolic forms through which groups and members of organizations can construct meaning. Narratives also provide individuals with a means to express and shape their identities. A narrative approach can thus be useful for studying the process of doctoral writing.

Experiences in doctoral research education have been narrated largely from the perspectives of supervisors and examiners, although in the last decade we have begun to encounter an emerging large body of literature dealing with doctoral students' experiences recounted by the students themselves (e.g. Hanranhan *et al.*, 1999; Morton & Thornley, 2001; Noy, 2003; Stanley, 2004). This recent trend has partly been dictated by the influence of post-structuralism, critical discourse analysis, and feminism, which has challenged the way doctoral research education is reported. A key contribution of these orientations is the role of subjectivity, against the age-old valorization of objectivity, in reporting research.

Against this background, I first offer an account of the theory that underpins this paper. I then outline my quest for a PhD. Further, I focus on my engagement with the writing of three rhetorical units: the introduction, literature review, and methodology, in two related pedagogic genres (research proposal and thesis).



In a reflective assessment of my experiences, I conclude the paper by highlighting some implications and suggest some areas for further research.

## **2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

I adopt a reflective-narrative framework in this paper to explore the writing of the doctoral research proposal (RP) and thesis. The framework adopted locates a researcher firmly within the research process and acknowledges the role of the researcher's subjectivity.

Within this broad theoretical framework, I follow Noy (2003) by adopting an auto-ethnographic stance, suggesting that writing about and through oneself is a scholarly illumination. Here, the writer addresses himself/herself ('auto') as a subject of a larger social or cultural inquiry ('ethno') vis-à-vis revealing writing ('graphy') (Ellis, 1997). This genre enables a writer to foreground constitutive dimensions that might ordinarily be trivialized or silenced in conventional scientific discourse. In this sense, I foreground my personal, lived experience and voice the relationship with my research and processes, rather than product.

There are two ways by which auto-ethnography is presented. On the one hand, an auto-ethnography may be woven around theoretical issues, either implicitly or tangentially (Ronai, 1999; Dent, 2002). In such a case, its theoretical contribution revolves around the writers' intimate knowledge of the subject matter, and its complex articulation through the text. On the other hand, the theoretical and the personal perspectives can both be explicitly presented, sometimes separately (Ellis, 1997), and sometimes in an intertwined way, where they are in dialogue throughout the text (Gurevitch, 2000; Jones, 2002). The latter approach is chosen in this paper as I consider it to be more suitable in conveying my doctoral experience.

The choice of the latter approach implies allowing the theoretical and personal perspectives to be in dialogue. Throughout this paper, therefore, I may be seen to speak in two voices simultaneously: the narrator's voice that presents an experience, or a gamut of experiences, and the theoretical voice that conceptualizes what is presented. Though this may be a complicated task, there are benefits to be derived from this dialogic approach. On the one hand, those interested in the narration may benefit from a theoretical understanding of the process in which they are engaged. On the other hand, those who are favourably disposed to theoretical discourse may benefit from paying attention to experiential testimony, at the risk of being put off by the seemingly under-developed argumentative structure of my narrative account.

In general, I adopt the narrative-reflective enquiry in my doctoral experience because such an approach can be revealing in terms of adding to the scholarship on narrative enquiry from a setting under-researched in the literature. Moreover, the narrative-reflective enquiry has often been used in the reflective practice traditions of Education, the Health Sciences, Gender Studies, and feminist research, but less so in Applied Linguistics, my broad area of interest. Besides, the present paper contributes to the scholarship on doctoral writing, and academic identity.

### 3 TOWARDS OBTAINING A PHD

I studied English at the University of Cape Coast (UCC), a preferred public university for many students in Ghana, graduating as a professional English Language and Literature teacher. Thereafter, I taught English Language and Literature in three different senior high schools, an elite school and two less-endowed schools, for eight years at different times. I pursued postgraduate studies in English at UCC and on completion taught at the Department of English at the same university for three years before commencing my doctoral studies overseas.

At the National University of Singapore (NUS), where I pursued my doctoral education, I explored the relationship between rhetoric and disciplinary variation in undergraduate writing produced by Ghanaian university students, focusing on the examination essays of representative courses in Literature, Sociology, and Zoology. My doctoral research contributes significantly, first, to the area of research in disciplinary writing at undergraduate level in a setting under-researched in the literature. Second, it contributes to genre studies by arguing that Swales' (1990) more rhetorical approach, which has often been associated with published writing, can be applied to undergraduate writing, given the findings in my research that suggest that students appropriate distinct 'moves' in writing their introductions and conclusions.

### 4 ENGAGING WITH THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (RP) AND THESIS

Swales (2004:101), a well-known applied linguist and genre analysis scholar, refers to doctoral research as a "generic chain": Proposal, defense, thesis, approval for the thesis defense, defense of thesis, revisions to thesis, and award of degree. This paper focuses on the RP and thesis in this chain, given their relative importance in doctoral research education (Swales, 2004).

The doctoral RP is taken as a statement of intent, a legal document (Hofstee, 2006) which outlines the trajectory of the 'theorology' (theory-and-methodology) along which a researcher seeks to travel in order to reach his/her destination. It is also illuminating to consider a RP, argued by Punch (2000), as a phase, plan, process, and product in the entire doctoral research. Its audience primarily consists of a board of graduate studies, department, and a thesis committee whose concern is to assess whether the topic is suited to a doctoral level of study, whether the research scope is acceptable given the time available for completion, whether there is likely to be difficulty accessing sources to fulfill topic objectives, and what technologies might need to be learnt and used. Moreover, in this genre a doctoral researcher is obligated to market his/her research.

On the other hand, a completed and passed doctoral thesis is broadly conceived as a report of findings of a higher research study and represents substantial subject knowledge gained as well as the cultural,

professional norms, and practices acquired during many years' socialization process in a discipline. A good doctoral thesis also demonstrates accuracy, methodological rigour, meaningfulness to society, originality, contribution to knowledge, and publishability. In contrast to the RP, a thesis is of considerable size and seeks to show that the research has been properly conducted within, according to Parry (1998), the norms, argument structure, and discourse structure of a particular discipline. Besides, the audience for the thesis is widened from a board of graduate studies, department, and thesis committee to include examiners who are considered to be the primary audience. Ultimately, a doctoral thesis represents the peak of a student's academic attainment.

## **4.1 First, the research proposal**

At the outset, it should be pointed out that there were different versions of the RP, both in the process of writing and in meeting the demands of different audiences. Throughout this section, however, I refer to the final 50-page document I defended in an oral examination.

### ***4.1.1 Topic and Introduction***

Conle (2000) observes that feelings and experience come together in the first step of any doctoral research and, in particular, the RP. They come together in the motivation that generates initial involvement with a topic. Conle further indicates that this motivation traditionally derives from the researcher's personal interests, expertise, and the needs of the field, that is, from gaps in a body of knowledge

In my experience, these observations were largely accurate as, first, I had become interested in disciplinary writing, seeing that undergraduates from different disciplinary backgrounds who took a general university course (*Language, Literature and Society*) I had taught seemed to attach different levels of importance to the different organizational aspects of their essays. Second, I felt confident that my knowledge of discourse analysis was sufficient to help me undertake this task, though I later realized that it was not. Besides, the field of discourse analysis had expanded more rapidly in the last decades than I had thought. There was a need, therefore, for me to read broadly in order to adopt the most appropriate discursive analytical approach to my research. Third, I noted, rather faintly, the needs of the field, which only became clearer as I proceeded with the research and continued to navigate the terrain of disciplinary studies.

Apart from these intellectual considerations, I felt that the choice of a research topic should be constrained by practicalities. A study that might involve extensive and expensive travel was to be ordinarily out of the question. But given that my primary data were to be examination essays of Ghanaian students, and that I also needed to interview faculty and students at the University of Cape Coast – in Ghana – it was likely that I would have to travel from Singapore to Ghana for the data collection. This was what eventually

happened. It was worth the trouble though as on my return to Ghana, I spent some time with my family, whom I had left for a year.

Against such intellectual and practical considerations, I chose to investigate this topic in Applied Linguistics: the interface between rhetoric and disciplinary variation. I discussed the viability of this topic with two professors who had served on my Master's thesis committee. Fortunately, they pledged their support. Specifically, I initially wanted to investigate three issues in relation to undergraduate writing: the macro-level aspects (introduction and conclusion) of examination essays; the micro-level aspects (cohesive devices); and the correlation between the quality of writing on the one hand and these macro and micro linguistic features on the other hand. Interestingly, my thesis committee members differed in their opinion each time the issue of the scope of my research topic came up. Whereas my supervisor felt there was the need for me to read widely on all three aspects and to decide later which one to focus on, one thesis committee member felt strongly that the scope was overly ambitious, arguing that the first (that is, the macro structure of student writing) could effectively be managed for a doctoral research. I eventually agreed with my supervisor.

Throughout the discussions with my thesis committee members on the scope of my research topic, I had had some uneasiness due to the experience I had in my Master's research. My Master's supervisor had commented that it was close to a doctoral thesis (in both breadth and depth of analysis) and felt that it could be upgraded to a doctoral thesis. However, due to the bureaucratic steps required at the University of Cape Coast, this idea was not followed through. Not quite certain about the difference between the scope of the Master's research and doctoral research, I had to ensure that my topic would allow for the depth, breadth, and rigour of analysis and discussion required in a doctoral work.

Once I was sure about the scope of my PhD research topic, I started working on the introduction to the RP. I considered the introduction crucial, given its contextualizing function for the entire research. Writing the introduction was quite a formidable task, as I had obtained much information from my reading. Since I needed to offer a background of the study and review the existing literature later in another chapter, the challenge was how much information I was to include in this early part of the RP. In response to my supervisor's suggestion, I adopted the general-specific discourse structure (Swales, 1990; Weissberg & Buker, 1990) in writing my introduction.

With specific reference to the content of my RP introduction, I had subheadings such as 'motivation for the study', 'assumptions', 'scope of study', 'definitions of terms', 'limitations', and 'importance of study', as advised in many pedagogic texts (e.g. Weissberg & Buker, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994, Hofstee, 2006). Looking at the content of RP later, I found that my RP did not contain a heading such as 'background to the study', although a close reading of my RP introduction revealed that the first seven paragraphs should have been titled as such. I feel the omission of this sub-heading made the initial part of the RP introduction less reader-friendly.

Also, the 'statement of problem' section often located early in the doctoral RP did not appear in my RP.

My committee members did not seem to agree on its position as again one member felt strongly that it would be more logical to state it after the literature review section; I pandered to this view, though now I feel that to engage readers about my topic, the statement of the problem should have been made up front. The statement of problem was formulated as follows:

This research focuses on the relationship between knowledge of the subject content and discursual expression within the genre of examination answers written by nonnative users (Ghanaian undergraduate students) of English in three different disciplines, namely Biology, History, and Economics.

#### ***4.1.2 Literature Review***

As I continued to search for the relevant information on my topic, I realized how my information literacy skills, computer literacy skills, and critical literacy skills had increased and improved. A by-product of all this too was that I began to experience ‘information overload’. Excited greatly about my ‘new discoveries’ and with the field becoming clearer, the pertinent issue became how much information to include in my literature review.

On the advice of my supervisor, I had to consider categorizing the various strands of information I had obtained. Categorizing the vast amount of literature into two broad sections as theories and empirical studies greatly helped to impose order on it and to focus my reading. At the time, the choice of four theories postulated by H. Grice, Michael Hoey, James Kinneavy, and John Swales was dictated by the research questions and my expectation that this would greatly assist in the interpretation of my findings. Studies on discursive strategies (later changed to ‘rhetoric’ in the thesis) were organized on thematic and geographical lines. Apart from the principle of relevance, I upheld the principles of representativeness and currency in prioritizing the use of my sources for the literature review section.

Also, given that the literature review section offers the doctoral researcher the opportunity to deeply engage with other scholars in one’s disciplinary community (Hart, 1998; Dunleavy, 2003), one of my thesis committee members often reminded and constantly encouraged me to adopt a critical stance – to which I gladly and gratefully adhered. As I was not very familiar with this notion of a ‘critical stance’, I had an initial problem, rather simplistically perceiving it sometimes as sniffing for flaws in a work. When I found something wrong about a work, my position as a researcher who was yet to make my presence felt in the field made it difficult for me to express a clear position. My supervisor’s encouragement and her occasional reformulation of some aspects of my writing gradually led me to demonstrate a critical engagement in my RP.

### 4.1.3 Methodology

Once my topic had been conceptualized and I had framed an introduction, I turned my attention to the research approach that would enable me to answer the research questions.

To some extent, the literature on research methodology (e.g. Bell, 1993; Flick, 1999; Creswell, 2002) I read offered some guidance with regard to the possible approaches I might use. At the time, one basic approach that appealed to me was the ‘descriptive research paradigm’, which broadly emphasized the benefit of collecting data in an authentic situation, rather than having a contrived set of data (Allison, 2002). It was also clear at the onset that I needed not only the examination essays for the textual analysis but also the interviews and questionnaire as a device by which to ‘triangulate’ the data. At this point, much as I tried to anticipate what my actual fieldwork was going to be like, I was limited in my ability to capture every detail.

Nonetheless, as advised by my supervisor, I had to consider some the number of scripts that might be accepted as a reasonable sample for a study at the PhD level, the number of questionnaire respondents, and the number of faculty and students to be interviewed. Deciding on the exact number in each case meant dealing with the issue of sampling technique. Here my knowledge of research methodology helped me to choose a particular sampling technique with respect to the three research areas. Of course, I also had to describe the research site, that is, Ghana, which had not featured in studies in disciplinary variation. I also had to spell out two stages in the collection of data: the pilot and the main study.

Writing the methodology section, I did not experience as much difficulty as I did when I wrote the introduction. This relative ease might have been due to the expository nature of the methodology section in RPs, in contrast to the more cognitively demanding and argumentative nature of the introduction. Besides, although scholars such as Tang and John (1999) as well as Starfield and Ravelli (2006) have mentioned the frequent use of the personal pronoun in conjunction with verbs denoting research activities in the methodology section, there was only one instance where I used the personal pronoun ‘I’ in my methodology section. Even more surprising was the absence of cited references. Possibly, I was still trying to find my way in either the general research methodology literature or the research methodology literature of Applied Linguistics.

## 4.2 And then, the thesis

As was the case in my engagement with the RP (Section 4.1), I focus on the final version of the thesis which was submitted for examination. This version had undergone several drafts with the guidance of my supervisor and other thesis committee members.

### 4.2.1 *Topic and Introduction*

I count myself fortunate that from the beginning of my doctoral education, I did not encounter problems with the choice of a topic for my research. As discussed above (Section 4.1.1), this topic had been motivated by professional, pragmatic, and personal concerns.

Following discussions with my thesis committee members after the defence of the RP, the issue of the scope of my research topic had to be revisited. With support from my supervisor, I decided to focus only on the first strand, that is, the relationship between the macro aspects (introductions and conclusions) and disciplinary variation (Literature, Sociology, and Zoology). The choice of different disciplines from the ones in the RP, namely Biology, Economics, and History, was pragmatic. I had to change from Biology to Zoology as I noted that there was no department or discipline by that name at UCC, my research site. Although I was interested in disciplines that encouraged a reasonable amount of sustained writing, I thought History students were likely to write too much, thus making the basis of comparison very difficult. In place of History, therefore, I chose Literature. On arriving in Ghana to collect data, the head of Department of Economics did not allow me access to the examination essay scripts, insisting that they were ‘security materials’. I was disappointed and surprised about this turn of event as I had thought that my status as an ‘insider’ (that is, a member of the university) should have guaranteed easy accessibility to those scripts. I quickly contacted my supervisor by e-mail and agreed to select Sociology in place of Economics. Fortunately, the head of department of Sociology was very co-operative.

In hindsight, I realize that a second strand involving the correlation between the quality of writing on the one hand and these macro linguistic features on the other hand would have made my research more interesting. In fact, one examiner had expressed a similar opinion. At the time I thought the inclusion of this aspect would make my research too unwieldy, given the time constraint. When I presented a report on my completed PhD work to my department at UCC, the discussion that ensued similarly revealed how this aspect (that is, the correlation between quality of writing and the use of the selected macro features) would have added to the quality of my research. I take these views as complimentary; indeed, I had alluded to this interest in my work as a possible area for further research in my concluding chapter (see Afful, 2005).

In addition, I spent much time working on the introduction of the thesis. Craswell (1994) opines that two approaches tend to be adopted in the writing of introductions: writing the introduction first so as to gain a sense of the whole study, even though this will eventually need to be re-written, and writing the introduction after the body of the thesis is complete. I chose the former. Since part of my research itself was on introductions in undergraduate writing, I was conscious about the nature, length, and quality of the introduction to my own doctoral thesis. At issue again, as was the case in the writing of the RP, was the extent to which I had to include some of the literature review material in the background of the study. This became even more pronounced as I had to substantially rewrite the introduction. There was very little resemblance between the RP and thesis introductions; of course, the latter was lengthier than the former. The idea was to give readers just enough to whet their appetite.

However, as I continued to read the literature after the defence of my RP, I realized together with my supervisor that instead of having ‘statement of problem’ as I did in the RP, I could have a section titled ‘Research questions’ made up of a general statement followed by the underpinning research questions of the study. The earlier part of the section entitled ‘Research questions’ in my thesis read as follows:

The study examines the extent of disciplinary variation in two salient rhetorical features within the examination essays written by non-native speakers of English, viz, Ghanaian undergraduates. In particular, I explore how second-year undergraduates orient their readers to their examination essays with respect to the use of introductions and conclusions in three different disciplines, namely English, Sociology, and Zoology.

As noted, this articulation of the purpose of my research in the thesis did not markedly differ from the ‘statement of the problem’ in the RP (refer to Section 4.1.1). I feel the location of the research questions in the thesis had one key merit: it provided the reader with knowledge of the driving force behind the research from the onset.

#### **4.2.2 Literature review**

I now recount how I handled the literature review section in my thesis along the following lines: source identification, source use (paraphrase, quotation, summary), positioning in relation to sources, technical accuracy, and organizational format.

First, concerning source identification, when I started writing drafts of my thesis, I was already familiar with various information-seeking behaviors expected of doctoral researchers: the use of data bases, search engines, e-journals, inter-library loan facilities, library staff, and personal communication. There was very little assistance that was offered by my supervisor, who had correctly assumed my competence in these areas. By using search engines, especially Google, and various databases for the Humanities, I located materials that became useful for the literature review section and other aspects of the thesis. In addition, I obtained three relevant theses from overseas universities through the inter-loan library facility of NUS. As I was experiencing ‘information overload’, I began to wonder about the extent to which all the information I had accessed could be used.

Bruce’s (2001) instructive discussion on the eight criteria – topicality, comprehensiveness, exclusion, breadth, relevance, currency, availability, and authority – to consider under coverage when writing the literature review section proved liberating and enlightening. Although I tried very hard to record the details of all references, I realized that citation details such as date, place and name of publisher, and page (depending on the type of materials) were missing in some cases. This was frustrating, especially when the information involved was crucial to my ability to make an argument, and I had time limits set for the submission of my drafts. I also had to decide whether to paraphrase or quote (phrases, rather than



sentences or whole passages). As advised by one of my thesis committee members, I quoted passages that were more than a sentence only when I felt absolutely sure that there was no substitute or better way of recapturing points raised in my thesis.

On my positioning in relation to the literature, I tended to allow my voice to run through the personal pronoun. Interestingly, discourse analysts such as Hyland and Swales have noted that the first personal pronoun appears to be the most visible way of demonstrating one's voice. At the same time, Kamler and Thomson (2006: 57) argue: "the question of the personal and doctoral writing is more complex than that suggested by advocating or abhorring the use of I/we". One examiner noted that I had generously used the personal pronoun in the thesis. Referring to Ivanic's (1998) and Tang's and John's (1999) work on authorial visibility enabled me to correct this anomaly; the methodology section provided ample opportunity for me to use the personal pronoun, but less so in the results, discussion, and conclusion sections. Also in positioning myself in relation to the extant literature, I used hedging strategies, reporting verbs, and evaluative terms. All these linguistic features enabled me to assert an authorial voice through a careful interaction between my personal opinion, other author's work, and my research activities.

The next aspect of my engagement with the literature related to technicalities in terms of the accuracy of citation such as correct spelling of names of scholars, punctuation in in-text citation, and the consistency of the principle adopted in the sequencing of the names of scholars in multiple-author in-text citations. I noted that ensuring consistency in the use of punctuation in multiple-author in-text citations and the choice of chronology, recency, or alphabetical principle, could add to the scholarly nature of the thesis. I adopted the chronological principle in my multiple-author in-text citations as I felt that that was most logical. My supervisor's caution that any carelessness in handling the above-mentioned technical aspects of the thesis would indicate solecism and lead to examiners 'nosing' for more 'serious' errors was helpful.

Apart from these four aspects of my engagement with the literature, my literature review section was organized around two aspects: conceptual framework and empirical studies, as already mentioned in my writing of the RP. However, instead of a combined framework of four theories in the RP, I chose only one, the Swalesian socio-rhetorical approach. A new dimension in my discussion of Swales was an exhaustive explanation of why other socio-rhetorical approaches were rejected. Similarly, in the empirical studies section of the thesis, I included studies on disciplinary variation from the view point of synchronic/diachronic studies, nature of disciplinarity, mode of studies, and linguistic features. As it turned out, I had two chapters for the literature review, one for the theoretical framework and the other for the empirical studies. This became necessary given the extensive nature of my literature review, which in itself reflected the expanding nature of the field of disciplinary studies.

### **4.2.3 Methodology**

After the defence of my RP, I decided that a case-study research approach was an appropriate way in which

to begin to examine the fundamental aspects of my research topic. Case studies can comprise a single person, or household, department, an institution or organization or community or even a country. This focus can be on description or an explanation, and they involve a single case or multiple case studies (Wallace, 1998; Bassey, 1999). Case studies allow for a mixing of methodological approaches from, for example, participant observation or intensive interviewing, to quantitative surveys. In a case study, the actual data gathered by researchers is specific to a particular context (Gillham, 2000), and thus the results may not be statistically generalisable. However, I still hoped that my choice of multiple-case studies approach will provide an insight into disciplinary proclivities in undergraduate writing.

The most appropriate unit for analysis in my research was the department. The main issue, however, was one which confronts many researchers conducting studies in the various disciplinary communities. How many case studies should be used? A large number of cases would allow more comparison to be made, and would presumably render the findings more generalized. But as I clarified the theoretical constructs underpinning my work, it became clear that detailed studies of three departments would yield more valuable insights than would the coverage of more departments.

Throughout the period of my PhD thesis writing, I became increasingly aware of the importance that should be attached to methodology, particularly in a mainly qualitative study where the ground rules are less precise. This concern with methodology was itself a developmental process to me as I immersed myself in the literature of qualitative methods and experienced first-hand research in the field. So I was able to extend my understanding and to adapt and develop a type of methodology which I believed was appropriate to the nature of my research and more importantly in line with the trend in genre analysis, which combines both textual analysis and interviews (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2000).

As in the previous rhetorical sections (that is, introduction and literature review) the question of how much information to incorporate in the methodology chapter proved equally onerous. One key issue was whether or not I should include the pilot study I had conducted. It was difficult to resolve this issue, but in the end I reported the pilot study in the methodology chapter and reported the preliminary analysis later in a separate chapter to ensure a ‘thick’ description and the reliability of the entire research. The second issue was whether or not to include mention of the limitations of the study in the methodology section. Concerned that the chapter on methodology was becoming too long, I included only the limitations pertaining to the data collection process in the methodology chapter, and included the others in the last chapter (conclusion).

In general, I found the writing of both the RP and thesis ‘messy’ and reiterative, thus reflecting the view that doctoral education is an interaction of the research activity itself and writing, as posited by Lee (1998) and Kamler and Thomson (2006).

## 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this concluding section, I discuss three main implications in respect of my engagement with the doctoral RP and thesis, before suggesting some areas for future research.

The first implication of this paper is the contribution my work makes to the emerging scholarship on narrative research as a mode of reporting the experiences of doctoral researchers (e.g. Gonzalez *et al.*, 2001; Bench *et al.* 2002; Stanley, 2004). Undoubtedly, doctoral students live their lives through telling stories about themselves; through these stories they express what they value and construct others' opinion about themselves. These stories may be told in different ways, from a fluent to a chaotic narrative; mine is none of the two. Further, my account can be regarded as a therapeutic process in which I try to cope with my doctoral writing experiences. My 'story' highlights uncertainties, frustrations, and an eventual sense of victory – all part of the doctoral experience. Beyond all this, by making a relatively personal account of my experiences public, I believe my story can serve as an inspiration and a challenge to many doctoral researchers who are either writing the RP or thesis.

Second, my story makes a contribution to doctoral writing research. In particular, it centers on the writing of three rhetorical aspects of both the RP and thesis in Applied Linguistics. An upshot of the account is the relatedness of the two genres and yet how different they are (Swales, 2004) in terms of their purpose, audience, complexity and length. My experience shows that both genres offer very useful points of entry into a disciplinary community in view of the differing level of depth and breadth of socialization conveyed through constant writing of drafts, dialoguing with a number of disciplinary specialists, and interacting with various support systems (either face-to-face or virtual), consistent with the literature on Higher Education and Advanced Academic Literacy (Swales, 2004; Hofstee, 2006). Moreover, there are recognizable changes in the process of writing both the RP and thesis, suggesting both genres as living and working documents, as demonstrated in my reflections on both genres.

The final issue is academic identity, which is embedded in the doctoral researchers' interaction with various support networks as they (doctoral researchers) start writing the RP, culminating in the thesis. My 341-page thesis is a build-up of my 50-page RP; but as I now look at the two documents, they are different. Can it be said that a "different work" amounts to a "different researcher?" If so, this is in accord with Kamler and Thomson (2006) and Starfield and Ravelli (2006), who suggest that doctoral thesis writing constitutes a becoming or identity work. Clearly, in both the doctoral RP and thesis writing, we undergo some transformation. That change, or shift, is a natural consequence of intellectual and scholarly growth, and unfolds within psychological, social, organizational and research contexts (Delamont *et al.*, 2000; Austin, 2002). I noticed how I had acquired a scholarly or academic identity: My becoming is reflected in my doctoral RP and thesis, which I now view not only as products, but also as a reflection of their own becoming.

Based on my narrative and its implications, I offer some suggestions for further research. First, in my narrative three rhetorical units, namely introduction, literature review, and research methodology of the

RP and thesis were highlighted. Other internal rhetorical aspects such as discussion and conclusion as well as peripheral rhetorical units such as table of contents, acknowledgements, abstract, and bibliography could be investigated with a view to showing how doctoral researchers engage with them. Secondly, my narrative takes into account my background as an applied linguist, hence my narrative was woven around rhetorical units with the interpretation grounded not only in the literature of applied linguistics but also in higher education and advanced academic literacy literature. Further research, still employing the narrative mode, could flag the emotions of the researcher as s/he experiences the various rhetorical aspects of doctoral research. Finally, interested researchers could also consider how doctoral researchers experience other equally significant aspects of doctoral research education such as the revision of thesis and thesis defence.

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# The Deregulation of University Education in Nigeria: Implications for Quality Assurance.

By I. A. Ajayi and Haastrup T. Ekundayo

## Introduction

The role of education as an instrument for promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of any nation can never be over-emphasised. According to Abdulkareem (2001), a nation's growth and development is determined by its human resources. The provision of the much-needed manpower to accelerate the growth and development of the economy has been said to be the main relevance of university education in Nigeria (Ibukun, 1997).

Precisely, the National Policy on Education (2004) highlighted the aims of university education:

1. To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
2. To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;
3. To develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
4. To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
5. To promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
6. To forge and cement national unity; *and*
7. To promote national and international understanding and interactions.



The belief in the efficacy of education as a powerful instrument of development has led many nations to commit much of their wealth to the establishment of educational institutions at various levels. According to Ajayi and Ekundayo (2007), the funds allocated to higher education should not be considered as mere expense, but as a long-term investment of immense benefit to the society as a whole.

The importance of university education to the individual in particular and the society in general has made the demand for university education increase astronomically in the last twenty years, resulting in a very high percentage of unsatisfied demand every year. *See table 1.*

The demand for university education in the last 20 years is far greater than the supply. This is in spite of the phenomenal expansion in the publicly owned universities in Nigeria from 1 in 1948 to 56 in 2007. It is evident that the government alone cannot provide the much needed university education to the teeming applicants seeking places yearly – hence the involvement of private sectors.

### **Historical Development of University Education in Nigeria**

The history of university education in Nigeria started with the Elliot Commission of 1943, which led to the establishment of University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948. UCI was an affiliate of the University of London (Ike, 1976). According to Ibukun (1997), the UCI was saddled with a number of problems at inception ranging from rigid constitutional provisions, poor staffing, and low enrolment to high dropout rate.

In April 1959, the Federal Government commissioned an inquiry (the Ashby Commission) to advise it on the higher education needs of the country for its first two decades. Before the submission of the report, the eastern region government established its own university at Nsukka (University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960). The implementation of the Ashby Report led to the establishment of University of Ife (*now* Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife) in 1962 by the Western region, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1962 by the Northern Region and University of Lagos (1962) by the Federal Government. Babalola et al (2007) posited that the University College, Ibadan became a full-fledged university in 1962. This meant that UCI, Ibadan and University of Lagos became the first two federal universities in Nigeria – the other three remained regional. In 1970, the newly created mid-western region opted for a university known as University of Benin. The six universities established during this period 1960-1970 are still referred to as first generation universities. Babalola et al (2007) remarked that during this period, universities in Nigeria were under the close surveillance of the government. Appointments of lay members of the council, and that of the vice-chancellor, were politically motivated.

In the third national development plan (1975—1980), the government established seven universities instead of the four proposed in the plan, and also took over the four regional universities in 1975. They were Universities of Calabar, Florin, Jos, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Ado Bayero University,

Kano — all known as second generation universities.

The third generation universities were established between 1980 and early 1990. They are: the Federal University of Technology in Owerri, Makurdi, Yola, Akure and Bauchi. While state universities were found in Imo, Ondo, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Oyo and Cross-Ricer states (Anyamelle, 2004).

The fourth generation universities are those established between 1991 and the present date. They include more state universities, Nigerian open universities and private universities. According to Okojie (2007), there are 26 federal, 30 state and 24 private universities currently operating.

### **Concept of Deregulation**

Deregulation in the economic sense means freedom from governmental control. According to Akinwumi, Isuku and Agwaranze (2005), deregulation is the removal of government interference in the running of a system. This means that government rules and regulations governing the operations of the system are relaxed or held constant in order for the system to decide its own optimum level through the forces of supply and demand. Deregulation allows enterprises and services to be restricted as little as possible. Deregulation means the withdrawal of government controls in the allocation of resources and the production of goods and services.

### **Deregulation of Education**

Deregulation of education means breaking the government's monopoly of the provision and management of education by giving free hand to private participation in the provision and management of education in the country. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) argued that the deregulation of education will help schools to become self-managing. Deregulation of education means relaxing or dismantling the legal and governmental restrictions on the operations of education business. Olatunbosun (2005) describes deregulation of education as a sale of knowledge to the highest bidder, which has the effect of lowering standards for the attraction of customers. As a deregulated sector, education will become a private enterprise undertaken by private individuals or corporate bodies that hope to maximise profit from their investment in education.

Deregulation of university education is a recent phenomenon in the country, which is borne out of the fact that the private schools are better managed than the public schools, judging from the experience of the lower levels (the primary and secondary schools). Nevertheless, the private sectors have been licensed to complement governmental efforts at providing university education to the masses. Today, there are 32 private universities in the country.

## Reasons for the Deregulation of University Education

It has been argued that the standard of university education has fallen over the years following the myriad problems bedeviling the system, which has created the need for private handling of its provisions. Specifically, university education is deregulated so as to:

1. ***increase access to university education:*** Following the perennially acute shortage of places in the public universities and the need to increase the number of enrolments, private hands are called upon to create opportunities for the teeming number of youths seeking tertiary education. According to Oyebade (2005), the license given to private investors in university education is meant to address the problem of excessive demand over supply. Although, access is in this case provided for those who can afford the high fees charged.
2. ***address the problem of scarce educational resources:*** Akangbou (1992) asserts that national educational systems have always seemed to be tied to a life of crisis. Most universities in the country have consistently inadequate resources, which invariably effects the quality of output they produce. Besides, as Utulu (2001) points out, another factor that accounts for the decline in the quality of university output in Nigeria is the lack of physical facilities. The universities in Nigeria operate in adverse conditions; overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, lack of library books, educational materials and so on. Addressing this problem calls for the involvement of the private sector.
3. ***raise alternative ways of funding the university:*** Apart from the poor quality of graduates, as a result of poor physical facilities, another reason for the involvement of private hands in the provision and maintenance of university education is the under-funding of the education sector. Over the years, this problem has been generating a lot of strife between the ASUU and the government. However, the presence of private hands in university education is considered an alternative means of funding university education in the country.
4. ***improve the quality of university education:*** The government is of the view that the growth of private universities in the country will allow for competition between the public and the private universities, in terms of instructional delivery and other activities put in place to produce quality graduates for the economy. Competition brings improved quality of educational inputs and outputs (Ibadin, Shofoyeke and Ilusanya, 2005).
5. ***enhance efficiency:*** Ibibia (2003, in Akinwumi, et al, 2005) posits that pro-university deregulatory schools of thought opine that deregulating the system will enhance efficiency. According to the author, with more players in the university system, there would be more rational and efficient allocation of resources in the short term. The long-term effect is to stabilise the cost of operation, with an attendant increase in, and improved quality of, production.

- 6. *align with practices in other parts of the world:*** It has been observed that in the more advanced countries of the world, both private and public sectors of the economy are involved in the provision and management of university education, and Nigeria cannot be an exemption – hence the need for private involvement in the provision and management of university education in Nigeria.
- 7. *irregular academic calendar:*** The varying crises in the university sector, which had been paralyzing the academic calendars over the years constitute a source of worry to the stakeholders in the sector. However, there is need for the establishment of private universities, which are less prone to disruption in their academic calendars.

From the foregoing, it can be said that the Nigerian educational system needs private participation in the provision and management of educational institutions, especially at the university level. This is because of the dynamic nature of education, exacerbated by the enormous resources required for the realisation of national goals.

### **Problems of the Deregulation of University Education**

Despite the immense benefits of private involvement in university education as highlighted above, the move had been criticized on various grounds, among which are:

- 1. *private universities are profit-making ventures:*** Private universities have been criticised on the basis that they are profit-making ventures. According to Etuk (2005), private universities charge high fees. However, not many Nigerians can afford to pay these fees.
- 2. *it widens the social gap:*** It has often been said that the deregulation of the university system will bring about greater inequality and widen the existing gap between the ‘*haves*’ and the ‘*have nots*’.
- 3. *quality may be sacrificed for profit:*** The private universities have again been criticised because, potentially, they may not produce the expected quality of education, as the proprietors are business owners who want big returns on their investment. Hence, cost and returns-recovery plan may jeopardise quality.

Following the claims of potential shortcomings leveled against the establishment of private universities in the country, the question now is: how can quality be assured in the education system while private universities thrive in the country?

## Private Universities and Quality Assurance

### *Concept of Quality Assurance*

Quality assurance is a proactive means of ensuring quality in any organisation. Quality assurance in education aims at preventing quality problems and ensures that the products of the system conform to the expected standards. Ebong and Efue (2005) posit that it is a holistic term that is directed towards education as an entity. According to the authors, it entails the suppliers and consumers and all the various activities put in place to produce quality products and services. Besides, Enaohwo (2003) submitted that the concept of quality assurance in the education system can be looked at from two angles, *viz*: the internal perspective (within the system) and the external measures (checks and balances by the regulatory agencies).

### *Strategies for Quality Assurance in Private Universities*

University education has been recognised to play an important role in the provision of high-level skilled manpower towards the development of the economy. Now, private hands are allowed to participate in the provision and management of university education. As a result, a lot of measures have to be put in place to ensure that the products of the private universities conform to societal needs. In this respect, the National Universities Commission, as a regulatory agency of the universities, has a vital role to play in ensuring that the standards laid down are strictly adhered to. According to Ehiametalor (2005), the role of the NUC is to ensure standards in academics. The author argued that the NUC's role with regard to private universities would be to ensure that the standards laid down are maintained and that administration is not compromised, run mainly for profit, or academics undermined – the sole purpose of the license. Ehiametalor posits that deregulation only confers ownership on the private education provider; the Federal Government is still in control of the university system. Below are the strategies that can be put in place to guarantee quality assurance in private universities:

1. ***availability of adequate and modern facilities***: The NUC will have to make sure that the teaching-learning environment is made conducive to providing adequate and modern facilities. Modern facilities in this context include adequate classrooms, computers, recreational facilities, and instructional aids. It will guard against over-crowded classrooms in public universities, inadequate library and laboratory facilities and the like. The provision of these in the private universities will go a long way towards guaranteeing quality assurance.
2. ***adequate funding***: Private universities should be well funded. According to Nwangwu (2005), when education is not adequately funded, the foundations of such education are weak; consequently the products of such education systems are generally weak intellectually. Therefore, the NUC has a vital role of ensuring that these private universities are adequately funded so as to guarantee quality output.

3. **appraisal of educational programmes:** Programmes run by private universities should be well monitored by the NUC to ensure quality and ensure that the programmes conform to societal needs. Continuous appraisal of programmes is vital for quality assurance in the university system.
4. **quality teaching personnel:** Teachers are responsible for ensuring positive changes in the lives of students in terms of skill acquisition, mental and moral development. In order to guarantee quality assurance in these private universities, highly qualified teachers or lecturers should be employed. Besides, highly-qualified lecturers, staff development programmes of various kinds should be put in place to ensure self- development and self-growth of lecturers.
5. **prevention of the establishment of illegal campuses:** Okojie (2007) posited that one of the activities of the NUC with regard to improving quality in the university system is preventing these universities from establishing illegal campuses all over the place. This hand of 'fellowship' should be extended to private universities. In this regard, the private universities will concentrate all their efforts on the single campus available, instead of running illegal campuses here and there, through which, at the end of the day, the totality is not up to a whole campus.
6. **proper monitoring:** Standards can be assured through proper monitoring. Hence private universities should be put under close watch by the NUC so that they do not deviate from the primary purpose of academic excellence in the pursuit of profit. The proprietors of private universities should be made to understand that the license granted for operation can be withdrawn at any time if there is deviation from the standards laid down.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the importance of university education to nation building. It examined the reasons for the deregulation of university education, which include the need to expand access to the teeming applicants; to address the problem of scarce educational resources, which had characterised all levels of education; to provide an alternative way of financing university education.

However, for deregulation to be meaningful, the government must set the minimum standards for would-be proprietors. It was therefore recommended that in order to guarantee quality assurance in private universities the following strategies should be put in place: provision of adequate and modern facilities; adequate funding; appraisal of educational programmes; employment of qualified teaching personnel and close monitoring of the activities of the universities so that their cost-recovery plans do not jeopardise the quality education they are to provide.

**Table 1:** Demand and supply of university education in Nigeria (1981/'81—2001/'02)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Applicants</i>	<i>Number Admitted</i>	<i>Percentage Admitted %</i>	<i>Unsatisfied Demand %</i>
1980/'81	145,567	24,191	16.6	83.4
1981/'82	180,728	22,408	12.4	87.6
1982/'83	205,112	29,800	14.8	85.2
1983/'84	191,583	27,378	14.3	85.7
1984/'85	201,234	27,482	13.7	86.3
1985/'86	212,114	30,996	14.6	85.4
1986/'87	193,774	39,915	20.6	79.4
1987/'88	210,525	36,356	17.3	82.7
1988/'89	190,135	41,700	21.9	78.1
1989/'90	255,638	38,431	15.0	85.0
1990/'91	287,572	48,504	16.9	83.1
1991/'92	398,270	61,479	15.4	84.6
1992/'93	357,950	57,685	16.1	83.9
1993/'94	420,681	59,378	14.1	85.9
1994/'95	—	—	—	—
1995/'96	512,797	37,498	7.3	92.7
1996/'97	376,827	56,055	14.9	85.1
1997/'98	419,807	72,791	17.3	82.7
1998/'99	321,268	78,550	24.4	82.7
1999/2000	418,928	78,550	18.8	81.2
2000/2001	467,490	50,277	10.7	89.3
2001/2002	842,072	95,199	11.3	88.7

**Note:** — Admission not processed due to prolonged ASUU strike of 1994

**Source:** Oyebade (2005)

**Table 2:** List of Federal Universities

<i>S/N</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>Generation</i>	<i>Year of Establishment</i>
1.	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	First	1948
2.	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	First	1960
3.	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria	First	1963
4.	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife	First	1963
5.	University of Lagos, Akoka	First	1963
6.	University of Benin	First	1971
7.	Ado Bayero University, Kano	Second	1976
8.	University of Calabar	Second	1976
9.	University of Ilorin	Second	1976
10.	University of Jos	Second	1976
11.	University of Maiduguri	Second	1976
12.	University of PortHarcourt	Second	1976
13.	Usmanu Danfodiyo University	Second	1976
14.	Federal University Technology, Owerri	Third	1980
15.	Federal University Technology, Akure	Third	1981
16.	Federal University Technology, Yola	Third	1981
17.	Federal University Technology, Minna	Third	1982
18.	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi	Third	1988
19.	University of Agriculture, Makurdi	Third	1988
20.	University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	Third	1988
21.	Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umuahia	Third	1992
22.	University of Uyo	Third	1991



23.	University of Abuja	Third	1988
24.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	Third	1988

**Table 3:** List of State Universities

<i>S/N</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>State</i>
1.	Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt	Rivers
2.	Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma	Edo
3.	Abia State University, Uturu	Abia
4.	Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu	Enugu
5.	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye	Ogun
6.	University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti	Ekiti
7.	Lagos State University, Ojo	Lagos
8.	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso	Osun
9.	Imo State University, Owerri	Imo
10.	Benue State University, Makurdi	Benue
11.	Delta State University, Abraka	Delta
12.	Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko	Ondo
13.	Kogi State University, Anyigba	Kogi
14.	Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island	Bayelsa
15.	Anambra State University of Science and Technology, Uli	Anambra
16.	Kano University of Technology, Wudil-Kano	Kano
17.	Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	Ebonyi
18.	Nasarawa State University, Keffi	Nasarawa
19.	Adamawa State University, Mubi	Adamawa
20.	Gombe State University, Gombe	Gombe

21.	Kaduna State University	Kaduna
22.	Cross River State University of Science and Technology	Cross River
23.	Akwa Ibom University of Technology, Uyo	Akwa Ibom
24.	Buka Abba Ibrahim University, Damaturu	Yobe
25.	Katsina State University	Katsina
26.	Ibrahim Babangida University, Lapai	Niger
27.	Plateau State University, Jos	Plateau
28.	Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode	Ogun
29.	Kebbi State University of Science and Techology, Aliero	Kebbi
30.	University of Mkar, Gboko	Benue

**Table 4:** List of Private Universities

<i>S/N</i>	<i>University</i>	<i>State</i>
1.	Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo	Ogun
2.	Madonna University, Okija	Anambra
3.	Igbinedion University, Okada	Edo
4.	Bowen University, Iwo	Osun
5.	Covenant University, Ota	Ogun
6.	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	Edo
7.	ABTI-American University, Yola	Adamawa
8.	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo	Oyo
9.	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	Kwara
10.	Bingham University, New Karu	Nasarawa
11.	Caritas University, Enugu	Enugu
12.	CETEP City University, Mowe	Ogun

13.	Redeemer's University, Ede	Osun
14.	Lead City University, Ibadan	Oyo
15.	Bells University of Technology, Badagry	Lagos
16.	Crawford University, Igbesa	Ogun
17.	Wukari Jubilee University, Wukari	Taraba
18.	Crescent University, Abeokuta	Ogun
19.	Novena University, Ogume	Delta
20.	Renaissance University, Enugu	Enugu
21.	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji	Osun
22.	Fountain University, Osogbo	Osun
23.	Caleb University	Lagos
24.	Salem University, Lokoja	Kogi

**Source:** Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board Brochure (2007/2008)

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# Political Power and Intellectual Activism in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*.

By Uzoechi Nwagbara

## Abstract

In the context of the political violence and socio-economic contradictions in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, which are fuelled by the inept activities of the ruling class and the multinationals, this study examines Tanure Ojaide's ideo-aesthetic predilections and views as Nigeria grapples with the tragedies of post-colonialism. Ojaide undertakes this artistic reconstruction in his recent work, *The Activist*. Ojaide's *The Activist* is a contemporary novel that deals with post-independence disillusionment about oil politics, ethnic marginalisation and environmental predation in Nigeria. The title of the novel evokes political activism or participation, which is needed in order to change Nigeria's landscape. Intellectual activism is central in effecting Nigeria's transformation. Intellectual activism deals with the ideological and political education or engagement necessary to raise the awareness of the masses about changing an unjust order. This sort of activism is relevant since acquiring political power by the intelligentsia is vital in combating the ills in Nigeria. Therefore to alter Nigeria's moribund politics, intellectual activism is a sine qua non.

“Power (unless it be the power of intellect or virtue) has ever the greatest attraction for the lowest natures...”

--- Charles Dickens, in *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 489.

“If man is ever to solve that problem of politics in particular he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic”

--- Friedrich Schiller, in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, p. 9.

## Introduction

*The Activist* is a political novel with social realist ideals. It reconstructs the plight of the downtrodden and marginalised in the Niger delta – and Nigeria by extension. Also, the novel refracts the destruction done to the Nigerian environment by the multinationals in partnership with the political class. The Activist, who is the protagonist of the novel, is a returnee – he is a symbol of the intellectualism, patriotism and vision needed to effect transformation in the Niger delta. As a stock character, his characterisation in the novel evokes wholesome change in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, and Nigeria in general. He shows such change to be attainable through change in the dynamics of political power and the engagement of intellectual activism, which is a reasoned form of political activism capable of provoking ideo-political engagement and education in the masses in order to upturn justice in society. The Activist returns home after studies abroad and becomes disenchanted with the status quo, so he jumps on the political bandwagon to effect change and development in his environment. His actions are in parallel with other well-crafted characters in the novel, who are equally agents of societal transformation. The Activist flagged off this ideal by participating in, and winning, election as governor of Niger Delta State in order to bring healthy change. The Activist's political victory was the first time anyone was elected to that position in the state – this is historic: “The Activist whose campaign had drowned the other eleven candidates' voices comfortably won the governorship race and became the first elected governor of the state in all its history” (318). Furthermore, his characterisation contrasts with other mindless intellectuals in the novel as well as the political elite, whose leadership style has failed the Niger delta community and the Nigerian state. In prospect, *The Activist* is a well-weaved tale of failure of political leadership in present-day Nigeria, where oil politics has held the masses down for a long time – and how to avert this bungling system through the coalescence of intellectualism and populist-oriented political leadership.

Ten decades after the amalgamation of its separate power blocs, Nigeria is still tottering on the precipice. To say that Nigeria is a nation in dire straits is no news; it is a verifiable fact. Researchers have said that the constitutive ethos of Nigeria was predicated upon endemic, imperial violence against the constituting nationalities. It was designed to put a spanner into the cultural, political, economic and social works of this nation, which is still groping in the dark with the bangs and pangs of slavery and colonialism – and recently neocolonialism. As the twin evils of slavery and colonialism left the centre stage, there emerged contemporary postcolonial realities. No matter the hue of politics or political power in Nigeria, it has spawned virtually the same crushing effects: political instability, socio-economic misery, environmental devastation, ecological dissonance and ethnic crisis, *inter alia*. The social contradictions in Nigeria are more pronounced in the Niger delta region, the oil producing area, where the nation's wealth is deposited. The oppressive system in this region usually provokes incessant conflicts and political violence. According to a leading Nigerian professor of sociology, Inya Eteng:

The fundamental contradiction is indeed most pronounced in the oil-bearing communities of the Niger delta minority enclave from where the country's oil wealth is generated. This fact is well known and highly acknowledged by the appropriating Nigerian state in power, the expropriating multinational oil companies and the expropriated oil bearing communities”. (1997:4)

It is in view of the above backwater that Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* was crafted so as to paint the inanities of misrule, and to use art to demonstrate an alternative means to political power, which finds resonance in the turf of intellectual activism.

The purpose of this groundbreaking novel is to elevate politics to its wholesome state – to develop the idea of politics as a patriotic vocation. Of all the political novels set in Nigeria, none but *The Activist* has so picturesquely reconstructed the plights of the masses that are perennially bludgeoned to submission by the system of command, and who obey and are seasonally plundered by the federal government of Nigeria in cahoots with the multinationals. Some political novels set in Nigeria like *A Man of the People*, *Season of Anomy*, *Anthills of the Savannah*, and *The Man Died*, among others, do address the postcolonial tragedies in the Nigerian body-politic, but it is *The Activist* that has captured in the language of modern arrangement the politics of ecological cum environmental violence and socio-economic oppression in the Niger delta, and Nigeria by extension. The ideo-aesthetic antecedent of this artistic penchant in the novel is underwritten by the philosophy behind Ojaide's poetic vocation. Ojaide's art is anchored on ideas of redeeming man and his environment from the clutches of devastation, as well as finding an alternative cultural system within the present national mess that Nigeria faces. In this vein, Aderemi Bamikunle's statement adds credence to this:

His poetry (art) takes off from the present in desperate search for values to redeem its malaise. The search takes him to the immediate past in the history of colonialism, and beyond that into the pre-colonial ancestral history and culture... he believes it is possible to move history forward through progressive regeneration. (my parenthesis; 1991:81)

The focus on Tanure Ojaide shows that his works are not mere artistic pastiche; they uncompromisingly reflect a genuine mediation in the realm of social facts – particularly in the Niger delta. This is the trademark of his artistic enterprise.

For Ojaide, works of art should accommodate socio-historical experience, mediating the goings-on in the body politic through literature. Thus, as Ojaide observes: “Literature has to draw attention to the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots. Literature has become a weapon against the denial of basic human rights” (1996:42). As the novel refracts the conjunctures in society and transports them to the fictive world, it achieves what Chidi Amuta calls “mediation” (1989:81), the ability of literature, particularly the novel, to participate in the drama of social realities and change. This is Ojaide's commitment in this novel. *The Activist* is a present-day Nigerian novel, which is timely as Nigeria trudges in the sleazy minefield of environmental injustice and an oppressive political landscape. The devastation of the Niger delta environment by the multinationals - represented by Shell, Texaco, Mobile, Chevron and others, as well as the political class, has been a major motif of Ojaide's art, as is demonstrated in *The Activist*. The ultimate message of this fictive work is that when political change is sought through reasoned, intellectual activism, the social space is made whole.

Politics and activism is recycled in the mill of *The Activist* and the upshot is a radical, revolutionary



Fanonian consciousness aimed at eradicating the exploitative order for a progressive and environmentally friendly politics. Following this, *The Activist* is a work of art committed to cultural nationalism and resistance. It problematises the brutality in the Niger delta, which is the setting of the novel. Oil is the cardinal reason for this brand of politics in the region. The politics of oil in the Niger delta cost the martyred author-activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other Ogoni eight their lives; it is responsible for the ethnic tensions, wars, mass killings, rise of ethnic militias and “ecological imperialism”, to borrow Alfred Crosby’s locution from the title of his landmark work of 1986. Ecological imperialism is a form of colonialism aimed at damaging as well as exploiting the environment and ecology of the colonised. Thus, in the “ecological war”, to borrow Saro-Wiwa’s phrase, whoever holds political power should dominate the equation of change. The level of poverty, squalor and degradation to which the Niger delta is subjected by the powers that be, are captured poignantly in the words of Ray Ekpu: “the story of the Niger delta is the story of a paradox, grinding poverty in the midst of vulgar opulence. It is the case of a man who lives on the banks of a river and washes his hands with spittle. It is the case of a people who live on the farm and die of famine” (2004:10). These images of lack, privation and domination re-affirm Ojaide’s artistic insights into the real world in the Niger delta as well as Nigeria, which *The Activist* refracts in the form of a novel. In underscoring this position, it is evident that “... the literary work manifests man’s understanding of human experience” (Strauch 1982:42). Ojaide has reconstructed the imbalances in the Niger delta. At this juncture, we shall look at the theoretical framework of this study, as it will offer insights into the conceptual paradigms that shape this discourse.

## Conceptual Framework

This study is predicated on these binary concepts: intellectual activism and political power. Both are like Siamese twins: separate them and there is a risk of at least mangling the dynamics of this study, or losing its import. This is why this discourse is forged in this fashion – to bring to the fore the essentials of Ojaide’s concern in the novel. Intellectual activism is essentially the ideological and political education or engagement needed to sensitise as well as galvanise the masses about the nature of politics in their environment; through this process, the masses could change the stifling political leadership in their environment. And political power amounts to political mandate or the ability to impact the political leadership of a society.

No human society is devoid of class struggle. Class struggle is a rectilinear function of an unending struggle for political and economic power between the ruling and working class in a given society. This conjuncture is mediated through power relations – groups involved in a contest for dominance. In a class society, such as is engendered by capitalism or power politics, the struggle for any form of control between the ruling class or powerful class and the proletariat class can only be resolved through political revolution or activism. However, while the economic is the most fundamental factor determining every relationship, political revolution or activism is the most effective means of bringing about societal transformation in an exploitative social space. To this end, the most desirable social landscape will emerge when the masses wrestle for power with the ruling class. This naturally brings about a just and equitable society.

The concept of political power is quite teleological – its control ultimately brings about transformation. Through history, man has contended with changing society for the better; this has preoccupied the minds of philosophers, artists, statesmen, and social scientists among others. This change can only come about when the mode of production of material life, which technically determines the ontological shape of other processes of life, is altered. Thus, literary and artistic productions are determined by the architecture of the modes of production that shape material life.

Furthermore, since the base determines the superstructure – where artistic, intellectual and political activities are deposited, to use the Marxist aesthetics, the artist has to engage in the political/societal debate so as to change the material configuration of society. The writer (artist) cannot be separated from the antagonistic class relations at work in such a society. The artist is a part of society; he belongs to it. Therefore, an artist or writer in society can, through his works, offer critical appraisal, constructive criticism and informed perspectives on the existing political situation and thereby mould or redirect his society's beliefs, values, ideals, politics and culture. Herein resides the meaning of intellectual activism: a reasoned form of political activism nuanced with political and ideological education.

Tanure Ojaide is famous for his commitment to using poetry to bring the travails of the Niger delta people to light. But in order to realistically portray Nigeria's postcolonial, he makes use of the novel. This is because it is the form that paints the most vivid, realistic and palpable picture of human existence. According to Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*, the distinctiveness of this genre is its implicit utilisation of a realistic epistemology (1972:13). Therefore, the novel is the most potent platform on which the societal ills of the Niger delta can be depicted. This is what determines Ojaide's choice of the novel – to chronicle the present as part of the historical realities that have shaped the plights of the masses in the delta, where the masses are in want in the midst of plenty. His intention dovetails with what Alan Swingewood observed in *The Novel and Revolution*, which is that the realistic chronicling of present social facts as part of human history is most viably achieved through the novel (1977:266).

After writing fourteen volumes of poetry, Ojaide decided to use the novel genre to more clearly portray of the living conditions of the marginalised deltans and the environmental neglect of this region. Therefore, Ojaide adopted the novel in order to most cognizably reconstruct of the meltdown of the Niger delta environment; this is arguably opposed to his first love, poetry, which does not give precedence to the enforcement of the real, but rather the spontaneous (Breton 1972:14). In *Homecoming: Essays on Africa and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, Ngugi speaks of the relevance of a writer's environment to his work: "A writer responds, with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time" (47). The socio-historical dynamics of this fictive work is redolent with the obnoxious practices of the Nigerian state and the multinationals in postcolonial Nigeria – of which the Niger delta is microcosm – where oil is at the root of all unacceptable practices.

Political power is at the heart of finding alternative order so as to winnow out the exploitative regimen in place in the Niger delta, and Nigeria as a whole. The concept of political power is an integral aspect of this study, which is an indispensable part of the philosophical fulcrum on which *The Activist* rests. In Ojaide's

judgment, a good work of art should champion the cause of the exploited in society. From the perspective of literary activism or revolutionary aesthetics, “the political criterion of excellent art is art which serves the struggle of the people against oppression” (Onoge 1985:44). In order for a writer to participate in the political process of the day, he has to make sure his art is tinged with politics; every work of literature is a commitment to a specific political ideology, and every writer is a writer in politics (Ngugi 1981: xii). Literature cannot stand detached from the developments taking place in a social milieu; its deep-seated social characters, derived largely from the conjunctures and events in the social sphere, necessarily imbue it with partisanship. This is in tandem with Amuta’s view that “... writers are implicated in the larger struggle which defines political life in wider society” (54). Put simply, literature is a product of socialized human experience.

### **Literature as Human Experience: Economic, Ideological and Social Imperatives**

The question whether literature is a refraction of social facts or mere exercise in aesthetics of language, has been a contested. There are opposing schools of thought on this issue, all struggling to demonstrate the reason behind their philosophical stance. The limits of this study will not permit an investigation of such a depth. However, the formalist school champions the “art for art’s sake” thesis, which states that works of art have no direct relationship with social facts. The other school of thought called the pragmatic school, looks at art as an end; this is because for the practitioners of this school, art is the ultimate instrument used to change people’s perception and ideology in a given social space – art has to be affective. This school questions the insensitivity of the formalist school, which does not make room for social realities to find resonance in artistic creation. It is in consideration of the implausibility and limitations of formalist criticism, essentially on the heels of the demands of what Frantz Fanon calls the “fighting phase” (third dimension) that pragmatist criticism is upturned. In the Fanonian theory of colonial and postcolonial literature, this phase distils when “... the native turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting phase literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature” (1965:179). Besides, this phase in Fanon’s theory resonates with Ngugi’s position, which Amuta sees as “intense sense of progressive social commitment” (1989:96). It is therefore imperative to factor in social facts in works of art so as to illuminate people’s path to a proper understanding of the goings-on in their society. On this strength, literature for the pragmatists, should mediate conflict between a dominant discourse and a local reality (Ashcroft 2000:1). *A priori*, for Ojaide, political matters should resonate with literature.

The social function of literature as a participant in the evolution and development of society has been problematic. This has actually thrown up the question of whether or not literature or art in general has any utilitarian value. Apart from the aesthetic function of literature, it equally has some social, political and cultural functions. In the view of Theo Vincent, “Literature is a great discipline. It makes you understand the world in a holistic sense, perhaps as no other subject does. Sometimes, literature can comfort you; it can calm you; it can open up the world, even its numinous essence to you, just the way religion does. So, in moments of anarchy, there are two things that come to your mind – the Bible and literature. So, literature

... is a very serious subject, very enriching” (2003:3). Literature as a facet of social institutions is part of the machinery of change, education and ideological persuasion in a given environment.

In *The Activist*, the plausibility of Ojaide’s narrative and historicity is founded on the contemporariness of the events, situations and conjunctures in the novel. To an extent, the novel could be mistaken for a sociological tale in view of its historiographic underpinnings. Following this, most of the places mentioned in the novel like Itsekiri, Abuja, Ughelli, Orhobo and others are real places, some of the organisations mentioned like OPEC, CLO and others are actual organizations, and some of the things or circumstances reconstructed in this novel bear semblance with the realities in Nigeria. For example, Shell and other multinationals are represented in the novel as Bell Oil Company and O&G Company. Nigeria, which is mentioned fairly often in the novel, shores up the historicity of *The Activist* as a piece of fiction based on truth. The activities of the Egbesu Boys and sundry agents of change in the real world of the Niger delta, dovetail with the activities of Delta Cartel, Egba Boys, student unions and other institutions in the novel that are the vanguard for change in the novel. The choking landscapes as seen in the novel and real life are largely responsible for activism in both worlds. Thus,

This activism can be attributed to frustration (on the part of the people of the region) arising from both state and oil companies’ negligence and destruction of the Niger delta’s ecology, which is the basic structure that supports life in the region, as elsewhere. It may be said that the struggles by the people of the region have been predicated on certain issues, namely: their exclusion or marginalisation in terms of access to oil revenue; their struggle for greater access to resource sharing (known in Nigerian parlance as resource control); environmental degradation; and egregious human rights violation. (Ojakorotu 2008: 93)

The lived experience described above finds a counterpart in the conjunctures in the novel. The novel in this regard takes on the Gorkyan toga, offering rare insight into the process of socio-historical reconstruction in its narrative. Understandably, Ojaide’s art is a product of his environment. In order to effect change in the body politic, Ojaide crafted the persona of a returnee, who returns from a distant travel to explore what modernity, politics, technological development and ethnicity – resulting principally from oil exploration in the Niger delta – have done to his roots and to the deltans. This intriguing connection between the situation reconstructed in this novel and real issues in the Niger delta, brings to light the potential of literature to engage with the issues of real life.

From an ideological perspective, *The Activist* embodies the dominant ideological conflicts in Nigeria – that of oil politics, ethnic marginalisation, class domination, and environmental politics, among other factors. These are some of the variables that shape the Nigerian society and its politics. In turn, ideology mediates literature; ideology is actually inscribed within the novel’s ambit. Hence, the radical thematic preoccupation of Nigerian writers’ like Ojaide elucidates the evils of post-colonialism. Therefore,

the wastage of the wealth accruing from the oil boom and the resultant moral atrophy that permeated all strata in the society was an open invitation to a literature that was unashamedly

revolutionary in an ideological sense. This, inevitably, led to the emergence on the literary scene of a new generation of young evolutionary writers whose preoccupation was the indictment of the self-indulgent political elite, and the general re-orientation of society and the sensitisation of its psyche. (Tsaaior 2006:417).

Other Nigerian writers have adumbrated ideological patterns similar to those in Ojaide's work, although they have done so in different ways. Emmanuel Obiechina notes that Nigerian writers

should have a special allegiance to the downtrodden in the Nigerian society, to the socially handicapped, to the women, the children, the unemployed, the sick; all those who are not able to fight their own battles. The writer should put on his armour and charge into battle in defence of the defenceless. It is my view that the writer in Nigeria of today has to take his position against the oppression of the people, all forms of brutalities, and of unwarranted violence against them masses. (1988:4)

From the above, it could be gleaned that the Niger delta environment – made comatose by the conduct of the multinationals and the Nigerian government – is an area that Nigerian writers should focus on, as Ojaide has done in *The Activist*. He has used his artistic prowess, and the knowledge gained from having come from that area himself, to reconstruct the inhumanity and despoliation to which the Niger delta community and its inhabitants are being subjected.

*The Activist* is therefore a burlesque of the postcolonial politics in Nigeria. The situations and circumstances described in *The Activist* are sheer simulacra of the realities in Nigeria. The social anomie portrayed in *The Activist*, is also seen in the Niger delta, as is echoed by Mayowa:

Violence in Nigeria can be explained from environmental and economic perspectives. It draws its origin from very harsh living conditions, exclusion from political participation and the brutal experience of ethno-communal skirmishes, which have recently become a feature of life in Nigeria... the state has promoted communal violence, and it also reveals the logical contradictions of communal violence in Nigeria. (2001:196)

In the light of the above, the “celebrated Nigerian poet-scholar Tanure Ojaide fires a salvo by bringing us *The Activist*, a provocative novel that articulates to readers the irony of oil exploitation in modern Nigeria... *The Activist*... includes a mission to change the livelihood of his impoverished Niger delta community...” (Okoro 2007:1).

### **Prospecting for Intellectual Leadership**

Like most concepts these days, the category of the intellectual is highly contested – there are many

divergent theories about what an intellectual is. In spite of the mountain of theories, large number of books, essays, and research works being churned out, there is no coherent, monolithic theory of what constitutes an intellectual. Engaging in the theory of intellectuals would rob us of the meat of this discourse. However, in *The Activist*, we are basically concerned with a brand of intellectuals: activist intellectuals. This group of intellectuals usually criticizes a repressive and oppressive social order. Because of their stance in society, they are seen as outsiders, hence their views are in conflict with the philosophy of the political class. The place of intellectual leadership in an oppressive world cannot be glossed over. It is the balm that soothes the aching condition of the masses, and gives them the needed consciousness to better their world. Despite the attacks made against the intellectuals in the postmodern era – that they do not possess the power to engage with universal values – and the breaking of this term into diverse typologies, the place of intellectual leadership is necessary to our world.

In this vein, the first noteworthy work that decries the universal position of the intellectual was Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, which argues against the universal position of intellectuals. In this book, attempts are made to argue that the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment – which had previously legitimated the idea of the monolithic nature of the intellectuals – have undergone a process of decline and fragmentation in the postmodern era of the late twentieth century. Thus, the masses no longer need the intellectual to know the world around them. Other typologies that came in the wake of this attempt include the Foucauldian “universal” and “specific” intellectual schools of thought as well as Gramsci's “traditional” and “organic” intellectual schools of thought, among other sub-schools – all aimed at trivialising the significance of universal leadership of intellectuals. However, the intellectual for Sartre is “someone who becomes aware of the opposition, both within himself and within history, between a search for practical truth (with all the norms it implies) and a ruling ideology (with its system of traditional values)” (1973: 246). The intellectual's consciousness of this societal contradiction is what Hegel calls “unhappy consciousness” (in Sartre 1973:243). And this “unhappy consciousness” is the “necessary possibility”, to borrow Derrida's phrase, of the intellectuals. The desire to change unpleasant an order has been the role of the intellectual; this is essentially what informs Ojaide's *The Activist* – he uses art to espouse an alternative order in the Niger delta, and Nigeria in general.

The Activist is in contradistinction to other intellectuals in the novel; Dr. Mukoro and Prof. Tobore Ede are in sharp contrast to the Activist. Dr. Mukoro cannot see the reason that the Activist left the United States, with its seeming opportunities, to come back to Nigeria, a nation reeling with privation and malaise (27). And Prof. Ede is a friend of the multinationals who uses his position as a professor at Delta State University to oppress his community. When a fire engulfs Roko Village as a result of an outburst of crude oil, and the villagers plan a protest in the wake of the nonchalant attitude of Bell Oil Company, the company use Prof. Ede to stem the tide. As an intellectual, he employs rhetoric, persuasion and double-speak to pacify the students who were poised to protest against the ignoble attitude of the multinationals:

The oil companies heard of the proposed protest. They had ears in town and in the university campus. They had dealt with many protests before and felt this would not be difficult to abort. In their meeting on how to handle the impending emergency, they decided to send Bell Oil's

community development officer to pacify the student group... Professor Tobore Ede, on a two-year leave from the university, came to campus with the task of pacifying the restless students... “The villagers set their village on fire because they wanted to extort money from Bell Oil Company ...” the community development officer proclaimed. (177-178)

Even the law Professor, Prof. Kokoba, who was Bell Oil Company’s former development officer, involves himself in the espionage, violence, exploitation and double-speak in order to be compensated by the multinationals at the peril of his community. Before the Roko Village fire incident, the villagers saw the need to protest because of a blowout in the village; besides, pipes crisscrossed the village, thereby putting it in a serious danger. In this instance, the multinationals use Prof. Kokoba to assuage the feelings of the villagers by telling them the village was safe. And since Prof. Kokoba is an intellectual, whom they respected, the villagers bought into his position on this very precarious and important matter.

When the villagers had protested many years ago about these many pipelines crisscrossing their village, the company bribed their chief twenty miles away in Warri and sent the community development officer, Professor Kokoba, to tell them that they were safe. The villagers doubted they were safe but there was nothing they could do after their own son they had contributed to send to study law in England, then a professor, assured them that they were safe. (176)

The brazenness of the intellectual class in fanning the embers of corruption and above all, their complicity in encouraging oil politics, which relegates the minorities to the back-burner, are what the Activist sees as the bane of his society. Even the vice-chancellor of Niger Delta State University is involved in this ugly system, as are some of the famous university lecturers.

What we see in this kind of operation is that those who are supposed to be standard-bearers for their nation through high quality of their intellectual and human capital, have been made venal and prostrate through bribery and other forms coercion by the government and multinationals – depicted in the novel as Bell Oil Company, Sina, Brotal and O&G Company. Also, ASUNU (Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities), which ought to be a beacon of hope, light and intellectualism, is an accomplice in this buccaneering.

The oil companies had their spies in the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUNU) and a feedback on government policies backfiring and not achieving the intended results. They met, as they always did in a clandestine manner, and agreed to look for other ways to drastically reduce the influence of the radical elements on campuses by pumping more money to stuff their mouths, if possible. They set their managers the assignment of looking for creative ways of silencing known and possible critics with huge amounts of local money. (206)

In the novel, the Activist brings to mind the nameless protagonist of Ralph Elision’s *The Invisible Man*, and (though he is not nameless) to Ayi Kwei Armah’s Baako in *Fragments*. He also sheds light on the

personality of Odili in Achebe's *A Man of the People*. These characters all foreshadow change and intellectual leadership in a world ravaged by ineptitude and disorder, both of which are crystallised in the postcolonial disillusionment in the Nigerian political class. According to Ngugi, "the disillusionment with the ruling elite is to be found in recent works of most African writers" (47). This is basically what Tanure Ojaide, Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngozi Adichie, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Wole Soyinka, Ousmane Sembene, Oswald Mtshali and other writers have articulated in their works, which are all set in postcolonial Africa, and focus on its political turmoil.

The Activist, who represents the voice of change and intellectual leadership in the novel, serves as a contrast to the brand of elite politics that other intellectuals in the novel like Profs. Ede, Mukoro and Kokoba represent. The Activist's ideological wavelength is in congruence with Ngugi's position in *Homecoming*:

I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organization that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country and sing a song. (50)

The idea crystallized in this passage is that the African (Nigerian) social space in which this "new song" is sung, necessitates intellectual activism so as to bring about change. Predominantly, *The Activist* presents the determination of the proletariat not to be stopped by the realities that the activities of the multinationals, the government and the elite throw at them.

The novel reads like Ojaide's response to some critics who accuse him of overt sentimentality and pessimism regarding changing the political structure in the Niger delta. *The Activist* unearths Ojaide's ideals and his aesthetic preoccupation with the total liberation of Nigeria from postcolonial tragedies. To change this smothering landscape, political power, sustained and nurtured by intellectual leadership is required. His concept of leadership involves the rise of the down-trodden who must take up the mantle of leadership. To make good the Activist's commitment to enlightenment, good character and intellectual leadership in politics in his social matrix, he considers raising the standard of education, should he be elected as the governor of the state. This is for him the bedrock of societal development and renaissance. To this end he says, "...Should I be elected, I will make improving higher education one of my cardinal pursuits" (314).

### **Contesting the Nigerian Political Space: *The Activist* as Political Novel**

History bears out the capacity of political novels to shape human civilisation and development. For example, Apartheid South Africa was a hotbed of suppression of political fiction. A perfunctory observation of this period, paints an unsavoury picture of state repressive laws, fiats and enactments that were aimed at frustrating politically oriented fiction. And apart from legislating fiction out of existence in Apartheid South Africa, writers were sometimes incarcerated, killed or exiled, apparently because the state machinery



feared that the power and influence of fiction would subvert their control of the state apparatuses and political rein. This period generated the fiction of Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Oswald Mtshali, among others, whose art basically gauged the political temperature of that moment. The recent instantiation of this tendency in Pakistan is a case in point. Pakistan has no wholesale ban on non-fiction, but does have such a ban on some fiction because of its capacity to revolutionize people's perception of the inner workings of the state. Nineteenth-century Russia was in the main, a socio-economic backwoods. From this grisly landscape emerged politically motivated writers who used their art to wrestle power with the powers that be. This era produced writers like Dostoevsky and Turgenev among others. Books such as *Writers in Politics* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The Power of the Story: Fiction and Political Change* by Michael Hanne, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* by Arthur Gakwandi, *Art and Ideology in the African Novel* by Emmanuel Ngara and *Art and Revolution: Writings on Literature, Politics, and Culture* by Leon Trotsky, etc celebrate the significance of literature (the novel) in contributing to the political transformation of society. Whether considered as meddlingness or artistic utopia, the point remains that the novel is a potent tool in the reconstruction of society for human freedom and environmental wholesomeness.

A political novel is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of the political developments in a given society in its aestheticization. It is an art-form that rallies against arbitrary modes of governance. In Nigeria, the political novel had as its primer Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*, which gauges the political firmament of the Establishment and the heartbeat of the Nigerian military in politics – which it prefigures. Following in Achebe's footsteps was Wole Soyinka's *The Man Died*, a map of animated anti-Establishment derring-do. After these fictive pieces, came *Anthills of the Savannah* by Achebe, *Destination Biafra* by Buchi Emecheta, *Waiting for an Angel* by Helon Habila, *Arrows of Rain* by Okey Ndibe, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Ngozi Adichie, and other works that see politics as a major social institution that should be given expression in reconstructing postcolonial realities in Nigeria. In one form or another, these novels, adumbrate the military engagement in politics in Nigeria, the fallout of civil wars and the tendency of the political class to hold on to power in order to perpetually hold the masses down. But of all these works, none has portrayed the Niger delta's contradictions in a more vivid and telling way than *The Activist*. The exploitative nature of the multinationals represented in the novel as Bell Oil and O&G Company, who are tenants to the deltans and the asphyxiating environment that their activities have made possible, are given a silhouette in Ikhide Ikheloa's review of the novel: "The hell-delta of Nigeria rages on without succour, its angry landlords refusing to be consoled, as their termite-tenants rape them and their land repeatedly and without mercy..." (2007:2).

Ojaide has richly illustrated the main reason for the exploitative mechanisms in the Niger delta. This is made possible despite certain draconian decrees and enactments that have made the federal government of Nigeria the sole decider of how oil revenue should be disbursed. This is the revenue formula – whoever has oil, even if it is deposited under their soil, the oil revenue accruable must be taken care of by the federal government, who is more or less a leviathan in the eyes of the people. This is part of what the protagonist of the novel, the Activist refers to as he chats with Ebi during their visit to Ebi's auntie, Torukpa at Okwagbe, as a facet of postcolonial politics and "communal anomaly" (156). Basically, part of the erosion of culture where people owned oil deposited in their land is the colour of politics at work in

the Niger delta:

Chief Tobi Ishaka took a long look at the situation in the Niger Delta area and saw no simple solution to the community's problem in the short term. He saw no easy way that the minority groups would seek for a political solution to the revenue sharing formula of the country. The majority groups were rivals and even hostile to each other, but they united on one side, and that was in ganging up against the minority groups from whose area ninety-five percent of the nation's revenue (sic) derived. Once the majority groups ganged together, they possessed the power of a monster. Add their power to that of the military government and the multinational companies, one could imagine the obscene force that the minority Niger Delta had to contend with. These big powers were not invincible, but it would take so much effort to defeat them... (160-161)

This passage points a flambeau at the character of Chief Ishaka, who is seen from his introduction in the novel as a highly political character. His revolutionary disposition in the novel is what is needed to change the Niger delta landscape, where neo-colonial practice has left a prebendal system in the ranks of the chiefs and their monarch. This pattern is reminiscent of "indirect rule" policy in the colonial era, when the village chiefs – as the case of the Niger Delta indicates – were used to clobber any opposition.

Ojaide's artistry is nuanced with the politics of revolutionising the society, where the elite see no need to redistribute the wealth arising from oil, which is the main livelihood of the oppressed masses in the Niger delta. This is apart from accruable revenue from fishing and farming. Nevertheless, the proceeds from fishing and farming have been depleted by the destruction of marine life through the activities of the oil companies and the federal government. Thus, according to Robert Young, "...poverty and starvation, then are not the mark of an absolute lack of resources, but arise from a failure to distribute them equitably..." (2003:135). In addition, as Ojaide identifies with "the wretched of the earth" in his art; he creates a vent out of the stifling political terrain that the repressive system creates and sustains. He carries his readers through different landscapes in the Niger delta and Nigeria in general, giving a cinematographic as well as naturalistic picture of this brand of politics.

Another political character in the novel, Omagbemi Mukoro, uses his student union activism to bring attention to the politics espoused in *The Activist*. He maintains that it is through gaining political power that change could come about in his community in order to make a case for redistributive economy: "Omagbemi saw politics as a means of using authority to change things positively, but getting to the position of power was a difficult path and he had to equip himself well to make it. To win an election, he had to use all resources at his disposal" (196). Even though Omagbemi Mukoro could use every means, which include strikes, riots, confrontation, and unionism among others to get at power and change, he sees dialogue garnished with intellectual activism as the most potent instrument of lasting change:

Omagbemi was young and had not experienced any democratic Government in the country and had no political models around to learn from. He was born under military rule, which had

continued in one guise or another for more than three decades to direct the affairs of the nation with guns and decrees. But he had prepared himself for politics by reading wide. He had read his history books and knew that Tafawa Balewa had a golden voice that cried for freedom. From his books too he knew Sir Ahmadu Bello as well as Zik of Africa and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, all astute politicians, who put their best for either their regions or the entire nation. He did some research to know about such political orators as Samuel Akintola. K.O. Mbadiwe, J.S. Tarka, and Aminu Kano that always held their listeners spellbound. (197-198)

Integrating intellectualism and education into the arsenal needed to effect change in the society is at the heart of Omagbemi's political engagement. This is an act of intellectual activism, as can be heard in his authorial voice. For him, "... the university must interact with its environment; it must be open to the people and ideas. He did not believe in the Ivory Tower principle that makes students and university teachers an exclusive segment of the society in which they operated. 'Tear down the fence', he appealed to the university administrators" (200).

As an aspect of the socialisation and "sensitization" process, the school system should be a medium through which the masses can be conscientised so as to effect change in the body politic. And this could only come about if the apparatuses of schooling are re-invented through intellectual activism. This will, in the final analysis, affect the shape of political activism. All Ojaide's major characters in the novel are essentially political characters. They include: the Activist, Pere, Chief Ishaka, Ebi and Omagbemi. They were all crafted to give credence to the artistic vision of the novelist, which culminates in populist governance. By doing this, the readers could gain palpable insights into how intellectualised politics/activism could radicalise people's thoughts and ideals and thereby affect societal development.

The precursor to this tradition in the novel is the Activist. His presence in the novel smacks of unusual intellectual leadership and politics:

Within the nine months of the academic session that marked The Activist's first year of return, the campus atmosphere had changed into a more radical one. Students that used to go and rob bus drivers on the highway were no longer doing so. The secret societies were still there, but instead of engaging in meaningless rituals in the grave hours of the night, they issue statements against the negative policies of the multinational oil companies and the military government... The vice-chancellor and other senior administrators got reports about the Activist and the radical students... This is not America, they said. He couldn't come to Nigeria and stir trouble in the university and when there was chaos runs back to his second home! (174)

For the Activist and his followers, there is no quitting; they stay true to their intellectual, political activism until changes emerge on the political horizon: the Activist becomes the governor of Niger Delta State, the marginalised became conscientised, the political structures are re-arranged and for the most part, the status quo is re-invented thanks to their leadership style. This is the brand of leadership Ojaide envisions in the Niger delta region of Nigeria and in the country in general: a leadership style that is populist-oriented and

truly democratic.

*The Activist* is truly a political novel – it catalogues the fate and conditions of the Niger delta masses and Nigerians in general in contemporary African politics. In this regard, politics finds resonance in literature at those periods in which the living conditions of a people is pushed to the limit, when a class or group of people is subjugated and its way of life threatened and survival becomes the only meaningful value. *The Activist* was born in this tradition: to bring to the readers' attention the realities in modern Nigerian politics, and to find ways of negating these contradictions by engaging in intellectual politics/activism, which the Activist and his allies embody in the novel.

Literature and politics are hardly separable; political development determines the trajectory of literature in certain times, and literary creations have equally influenced political developments. Thus, political novels are like thermometers. They calibrate the temperature of a given era's political symptoms. Literary history is awash with evidence of this. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), is a dramatic meditation that distils the effects of an autocratic society, with its sweeping repression on thought, moral inquiry and independent spirit. *All the King's Men* (1946) by Robert Penn Warren, is a fictionalised report on a major populist politician from the American South; *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which is largely considered a sentimental account of the American experience of slavery, was instrumental in the Abolitionist Movement, and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), which mirrors the Nigerian coup d'état of 1966, was instrumental to the disquiet that visited him personally – the military personnel wanted his head because they thought he had foreknowledge of that putsch.

### **Social Responsibility, Media, Political Power and Intellectual Activism**

Political power is attained through information dissemination and thought control. In this context, parallels exist between Reinhold Niebuhr's "necessary illusion" thesis and the "noble lies" theory of Leo Strauss, and between the "public relations" proposition of Edward Bernays and the "myth making" hypothesis of Niccolo Machiavelli. In all of these positions, which are used to distort facts, the ultimate aim is to ascertain how political power utilises propaganda and misinformation to misrepresent and distract from the real, factual issues of the day in order to maintain confusion and complicity. This approach thereby constitutes a roadblock to real democracy. In media practice, the concept of social responsibility informs us that the media should be responsible to the people in order to advance the cause of good governance. This technically means that the media should be a platform to advance the cause of humanity. It calls for socially relevant information to be disseminated and shared, thereby making available the stimulation of public dialogue on issues of concern to a democratic, populist society.

In a totalitarian society, it does not necessarily matter what the public think, since the government can achieve people's consent by using brute force. But when the government can't control the people by force, they have to control what they think as well; and the standard manner of achieving this is through

propaganda. So, propaganda is to democratic culture what brute force or bludgeon is to totalitarian regime. Usually in authoritarian states, the media is the channel through which the government controls people's opinion, thereby manufacturing consent. This is usually achieved via propaganda or stereotype. This is what Walter Lippmann calls the "picture in our heads" (1997:95). In a real democracy, when the media does this in faithfulness to social responsibility, it does not merely make a case for "journalistic activism in challenging and changing oppressive structures" (Shah 1996:145), rather it galvanizes "sensitization" and "conscientisation" amongst the public regarding the nature of such oppressive order as well as showing us how to change such inept landscapes. Every free society should ensure that the sovereignty of the people and the liberty of the press are correlative; they play complementary roles in the realisation and advancement of democratic culture. Sadly, not all democracies are truly representative of the people, nor are they uniformly participatory. This unwholesome situation parallels other, authoritarian governments.

In military regimes as well as democratic governments with weak, dogmatic democratic culture, democracy has been reduced to a mere doctrine of constants, wherein the masses are not truly represented. Such regimes balk at the ideals of participatory democracy, which foist on the media the triadic responsibility of being a civic forum for political dialogue that facilitates pluralistic views, a watchdog against the abuse of political power, and a mobilizing agent of the citizens. The media should be a catalyst for freedom. As Ogbondah observes, "a free press is an indispensable institution of a democratic society" (1997:291). A people whose social advancement is weakened by despotic government or through the activities of socially irresponsible media cannot make any meaningful progress. As a weak media becomes a platform for mere sedation rather than stimulation, a people's political freedoms are circumscribed, thus impinging on society's self-advancement and real democracy (Ngugi 1995:49). The foregoing is the backdrop of the Nigerian society reconstructed in Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist*. Arguably, the amount of influence the media have on political events is determined by the relationship between them and the government or the political leadership at work in such society.

In Nigeria, the relationship between the media and the Nigerian government has never been cordial, to say the least. The proscription of media houses, incessant arrests of journalists, their incarceration and the brutality exercised by the powers that be against journalists and media practitioners are cases in point. In order to effect reasonable, progressive change in the body politic, the control of the media and the shaping of its contents are vital. This is basically what has informs the Activist's decision to set up a media house, so as to contribute to the efforts needed to change the inept order in the Niger delta. This attempt by the Activist amounts to intellectual activism – an act of ideological and political sensitization – the media help in shaping a people's opinion about the goings-on in their environment. It helps to obviate servitude of opinion, it contributes to a widening of a people's perspectives on politics and, above all, it deepens the intellectual alertness of the citizens, which ultimately impacts public opinion. For the Activist, this is a way of gaining political power and contributing to healthy governance, which is pro-people, fair, democratic and politically intellectual.

He had his eyes set on controlling a segment of the media to influence or affect public opinion.  
He had seen how the concerns of the Niger delta people had gone unreported. If he controlled

a media house, that would not happen. The people needed allies in the media and he would provide one for them in whatever he chose to invest... Many people who nursed political ambition were already establishing television or radio stations in preparation for partisan politics. (267)

Socially responsible media goes beyond objective reporting to interpretive reporting; it foregrounds socially responsible activism, which is an upshot of political activism. Thus, social responsibility theory in media practice requires the explanation, interpretation and conscientisation of the populace regarding news reportage in their environment.

Socially responsible media is the idea behind the Activist's establishment of *The Patriot*, a newspaper whose motto is: "Justice and humanity for the people" (269). With *The Patriot*, the Activist distills the idea that if truth is reported without distortion, there should follow an advancement of human freedom on all fronts. This is essentially because development is a process of sensitization and conscientisation, whereby a people takes stock of their situation and circumstances and as a group devises solutions (Bougault 1995:230). Thus, in order to have political development, the media have to be involved.

The media is a veritable instrument for the demystification of dogma, superstition and stereotype. Also, the media is a platform for the agitation of the citizen's rights and education; it is a medium for deflecting propaganda, half-truth and lies; and more than anything, it is an organ of political activism. This is the mindset that the Activist attains from his experience in the United States of America, where he had lived as an intellectual, whose power of imagination that nation has enlarged.

He had learnt from experience in the United States how the media manipulated public opinion to support a particular candidate they endorsed and he had anticipated the paper would play a crucial role in his political career. Fortunately, the paper was very popular in the State and was selling well outside too. With a good campaign organization, the Activist was sure to have a free medium to present his case to be governor of the Niger Delta State or one of the three senators representing the State at Abuja. (310)

In order to effect populist-oriented "changes to the State government" (318) and Abuja, the Activist maintains that the media should be a cardinal tool in achieving his political dream of seeing the Niger delta free from the miasma of post-colonialism and environmental neglect, to counter "the strong howling winds of the savannah" (312).

In this vein, the Activist sees a socially responsible media as the bastion of hope for the downtrodden of the Niger delta – the voice of Nigerians in their struggle for reasoned, political power. Also, for the Activist, who is a member of Board of Directors of *The Patriot* and, his cohorts like Ebi, the manager/publisher of the paper, and Omagbemi Mukoro, the paper's editor-in-chief, the decades of damage done to the Niger delta, which had been reported incorrectly and with sickening bias by the powers that be, including their paid partners – the journalists, has to be given fair and balanced reportage:

For the first time people of the Niger delta freely exercised their public voice. Incidents in the area that used to go unreported started to appear in black-and-white to be read and kept as a witness of their experiences. The paper produced annals of local events, a book of the major experiences of the people. It detailed how the people fared in the previous year ... and became the unofficial ombudsman of government and corporate activities in the Niger Delta area. (269)

## Conclusion

A riveting aspect of Ojaide's artistic craftsmanship is the peculiar manner in which he describes history as a crucible through which humanity relates to the cultural, political, social and economic state of society. This approach is evident in *The Activist*. For Ojaide, art entails the documentation of the diffused pains and clamour of the oppressed as well as a blueprint for negating the contradictions of society. His knack for producing socially relevant art that paints the plight of the downtrodden in a class oriented society, places Ojaide in stead with eminent social realist novelists on the African continent like Ousmane Sembene, Festus Iyayi, Isidore Okpewho, Wole Soyinka, Magfouz Naguib, Miriama Ba, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Alex La Guma, among others. In *The Activist*, Ojaide embarks on an aesthetic investigation of lived experience in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, an investigation that is aimed at negating the grisly cadences of postcolonial disillusionment.

This study has examined the repressive political power structure in the Niger delta and by extension, Nigeria, and how to resist this system through intellectual activism – a process that entails the incorporation of reasoned, ideological and the political education necessary to galvanise change in society. In doing this, the downtrodden could redeem their environment under threat by the political class. Here lies Ojaide's social vision in the novel: invoking social justice and contesting the tenets of repressive, exploitative order. This is achieved by intellectual politics devoid of the shenanigans of the political class. Though a refraction of realities in a given social matrix, poetry is in Tanure Ojaide's opinion is a veritable tool that can be used to illuminate a human path, and engage with freedom in light of the traduced dignity of the human, and the battered environment.

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