A Poetics of Foreignness

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Abstract
A Poetics of Foreignness

A Poetics of Foreignness is about the ontology and epistemology of foreignness. This thesis project began as a series of theoretical investigations into foreignness but was transformed by the processes involved, and shifting relations between, my initial analytical framework and a series of conversations which drew on these critical understandings. In this respect, the thesis has multiple and intersecting points of origin. It developed through, and alongside my book, Foreign Dialogues — a series of conversations on foreignness with Australian and international writers and intellectuals;¹ and a subsequent series of radio essays and conversations based on some of the dialogues.² In each stage of this process, I was engaged in new ways of thinking time and the spatial production of a work. This analysis has involved the time and labour of production: it took three years to research, conduct and compile the conversations, and two years to critically assess, analyse and write up my research. The radio dialogues were undertaken three years after the initial conversations — they exist after the production of the book, and between the completion of this thesis. It took six months to retranslate the conversations into radio essays. In this way, all of these practices included and incorporated the time of writing, the structures and technologies that cannot be directly ‘regained’ in the final production, but form the basis of this thesis. The structure of my argument develops, then, through a critical examination of foreignness and the practical components involved in producing the conversations and this research, and as a supplement to this argument, reflections on the processes involved in revisiting foreignness through the radio dialogues. I establish how the intersections of theoretical and cultural practice coexist in my writing and critical analysis. I demonstrate that theoretical work does not exist in a vacuum, but is informed by the on-going relationships between the practices of a researcher and the processes of writing.

In this thesis, then, I develop a critical framework which examines the relationships between foreignness, cultural identity and the practice of writing through a series of dialogues and conversations with different writers and intellectuals. My analysis involves exploring how the conversations ‘speak’ the personal and political experiences of living and writing as a foreigner. My task, here, is as the interlocutor — the mediator or translator between different life experiences and critical practices. My interest lies in the various ways narrating one’s life touches on certain elements in the aesthetics and politics of writing. I examine how the politics of experience and aesthetic production intertwine throughout the conversations and in the production of this text. This, I argue, can be understood as a kind of poetics of foreignness. I show how the conversations are the ‘poetics’ that enact the trans-

¹ Foreign Dialogues — Memories, Translations, Conversations was published in 1998 by Pluto Press, Australia.
² Foreign Dialogues — radio series written and presented by Mary Zournazi, produced by Mary Zournazi, Brent Clough and Matthew Leonard for Radio Eye, Radio National, ABC Radio. The series was broadcast February/March 1999 and rebroadcast September 1999.
lations of, and processes through which, my own experiences and critical engagements with foreignness can be understood. In this process, the dialogues and conversations have undergone a translation or rewriting which has involved the analysis of the interface of speaking and writing about foreignness and the spaces in-between — the modes of perception that produce different cultural and political identities; and the practice of writing the text itself — the dialogic interchange of different voices and ways of knowing. I argue this can be viewed as a kind of dialogic imagination which involves a different way of hearing, listening and writing about cultural otherness.

As this thesis is dialogic in character, the reader can choose to work through the thesis in a linear fashion or to begin the thesis at any part. In this sense, the thesis is divided into three interrelated parts which can be read as different translations of each other. Part One is my theoretical exposition of foreignness, the methodology of practice and analysis of this research. Part Two is based on the book Foreign Dialogues — the series of conversations with Eva Hoffman, Antigone Kefala, Elspeth Probyn, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Julia Kristeva, Sneja Gunew, Renata Salecl, Laleen Jayamanne, Denise Groves, Len Ang and Alphonso Lingis. The conversations draw on layered senses of self and belonging, the experience of memory and migration, the cultural affects of language and translation through different critical practices and theoretical engagements. In the last part, I discuss and include as a postscript to this research, the radio essays and dialogues based on the conversations. The radio conversations are attached to the thesis in CD form. I suggest how these radio conversations enact a different way of speaking and writing about foreignness, and explore the on-going relationships between dialogue, translation and a critical imagination.
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This thesis is a production of friendly interlocutions and a network of different places and relationships. The thesis has been like a long friendship — a friendship with numerous ups and downs, failures, musings and wanderings. But we have now come to the end of our path and as we part hands, so to speak, we wander off in our separate ways and leave each other in faith and in solitude.

I would like to thank those friends and collaborators who have seen me through this long and arduous journey. With thanks and gratitude to my supervisors: Ien Ang, for her pragmatic considerations of the different versions of this thesis, which have taught me how to find my own critical voice. To Maria Angel for her inspiration, friendship and insight through the various stages of this journey; and to Anna Gibbs for her initial faith and belief in my work, without it — I couldn’t have written and sustained this project. I would also like to thank Cate Poynton for her ‘caretaker’ role at various moments in the production of this thesis.

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Special thanks to Tonje Akerholt for her continual friendship, love and support and for proofing this thesis, the conversations and the book, and to Helen Kundicevic for the publication and formatting of this thesis. I would like to thank Maria Nugent for her initial belief in my conversational research, and Tony Moore and Colin Smith at Pluto Press who made the book, Foreign Dialogues, possible. Special thanks to Matthew Leonard and Brent Clough who taught me how to make and produce radio, and how to think in other realms and mediums. A sincere thanks to Andrew Metcalfe for long discussions about writing and the ‘care of the self’. Our discussions inspired me to finish and to continue to write against all odds. A special thanks to Catherine Campbell for her on-going professional ear and emotional support.

With love and enduring thanks to Marie-Luise Angerer, Alphonso Lingis and Carolyn Burke who have sustained my faith in friendships and long distance relationships. And to all the collaborators in this thesis, I thank you for your time, energy and for teaching me how to think outside my own parameters.
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It is impossible to acknowledge all of the people who have been involved in this long and protracted process. But the thesis is dedicated to all of the peoples, friends and encounters I have, and continue to have, that inspire me to believe in the honesty and integrity of intellectual research. I hope that I can continue to learn how to research and write with honesty, integrity and friendship.
Preface

Late Afternoon on the banks of the Parramatta River...

Late afternoon on the banks of the Parramatta River I circle the foreshore like I am drawing endless spirals in black pen on a white surface. The pattern of my feet changes the surface of the sand and its contours. As the evening starts to settle, I am still walking around in endless circles, and I feel a strong sense of sadness and confusion. I move along the sand, pausing for a moment, here and there, walking over the same tracks of sand. I hear the water move up against the foreshore and the murmuring of childhood memory erupts and hits the surface of my thought. Like the wounds of a scar on my body that has been re-opened, I scratch, poke and peel the surface. I write this memory down, here and now, as a way to move the black shadows of this page and the white surfaces that produce the contours of this script.

It is late afternoon and I come home from school. I look forward to talking to mother and settling into an afternoon of stories, eating and television. As I approach the door of the house I can hear screaming and shouting. I stand in the threshold of the doorway and see my brother seated on a chair in the kitchen. The screaming becomes more audible as I stand between the door and the threshold of the house. The screaming continues: I MUST GO HOME. I MUST GO. In a violent language that is spoken in Greek and then repeated in English — I MUST GO HOME shatters me. I step in my tracks. I pause for a moment, fear has seized me and my voice is caught in my throat. It is a fear I cannot comprehend, and it is a fear that returns like a feeling that exists beside me, as I write this memory down.

My brother is yelling he has to go back to Greece. He has to go and fight in the army to claim back the territory the ‘Turks’ have taken (it is 1974 and there is the war between Greece and Turkey). As I make my way through the doorway, my brother stares at me, he is aware of my fear, but cannot stop the violent outburst. He sits facing my parents and myself — telling us that he has to go to fight because the Australians are controlling his mind. He shifts his body in the chair, and moves from screaming about the Turks, to yelling about the Australians. Both countries and groups of people are invading his space, his mind. Through complicated technological devices coming from our Australian neighbour — like telephonic coils wrapped up inside his head — messages are being sent. The neighbours are sending signals through the CB radio, through invisible mind controlling antennas that come from the top of their houses and he can only escape them by going to Greece and fighting. The technological voices are amplified and surge as a maddening rage against Australia and against the Turks, who are invading his so-called country of origin. He is caught in the interzone of languages, of cultures and of conflicting realities. He cannot go home. The Australians have too much of a hold on him.

I remember this walking and writing, the ruptures of language and of schizophrenia that shape different memories of my childhood, and my various stories and senses of being at ‘home’. My own understandings of place have always been encountered through the strange and phantasmatic wanderings of my brother. His foreignness, his languages, his fears and desires. In these realities, Greece figures like mythical present: a site, a territory of dispute and redemption. Greece is an imagined point of origin for all of us — my parents who are diasporic Greeks, my own relations mediated by my parents’ migration, and my brother’s desire to return to a place never occupied. These are the strange processes of identification and displacement, my real and imagined homes, the hauntings of other languages, voices and places. It is these voices that are interwoven through a montage of stories, theories and encounters into foreignness...
Part One: A Poetics of Foreignness
I Introduction
Strangers, Foreigners, Exiles...

In the context of a world increasingly shaped by mass migration, refugeeism and global travelling, the experience of the foreigner is an integral part of the formation of nation-states and concepts of belonging. But strangers, foreigners, exiles are often used as tropes to describe those who are considered outside a community, language or nation.¹ Strangers occupy unhomely places. They unsettle the boundaries of the nation and the trajectories of the self. In the everyday sense of the term, to be foreign evokes this strangeness: foreigners are seen as the other, alien and different. As the Australian Macquarie Dictionary notes, to be foreign means ‘pertaining to, characteristic of, or derived from another country or nation; not native or domestic; external to one’s own country or nation[...] irrelevant or inappropriate; remote’ (1988: 690).² From a legal standpoint, the dictionary further explains the foreigner as: ‘one who is outside the legal jurisdiction of the state; alien’ (690). In this sense, foreignness simply evokes the strange or unfamiliar.

What is crucial here is the notion of foreignness — how the strange and unfamiliar is experienced through the lived reality of foreigners. But this lived sense of self involves the everyday positioning of being placed outside a community, and invokes at the same time, how the ‘foreign’ is situated within the symbolic and cultural narratives of a nation. In Zygmunt Bauman’s (1990) writing, the foreigner as the stranger in modernity, exists as an ambivalent figure — a figure that is neither friend nor enemy, but an abject other. As Julia Kristeva (1982a) argues, those who are considered as

¹ 'There are different takes on exploring the notion of exile across a range of writings. See Edward Said ‘Reflections on Exile’ (1990) for discussion of the link between exile and nationalism. Said’s work and different concepts of exile are discussed in some of the conversations in this thesis. See Nikos Papatsergiadis Modernity as Exile (1993) for interesting literary and philosophical discussions of exile, modernity, and the work of John Berger. Elizabeth Grosz’s essay ‘Judaism and Exile: The Ethics of Otherness’ (1990) traces a notion of exile through the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Grosz explores philosophical questions around exile and otherness to think the relations between difference and contemporary subjectivity. Importantly, for Theodor Adorno, the pain and experience of exile has been documented in his book Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (1994). For Adorno the condition of exile and the role of the intellectual have common elements for contemporary notions of self and ethics. In the ethical relation of intellectual writing and the concept of being, Adorno argues: ‘it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home’. For Julia Kristeva contemporary subjectivity and the notion of a writing self is always in some kind of exile. Kristeva’s thoughts on exile, subjectivity and writing emerge throughout this essay and some of the conversations. See Kristeva ‘Women’s Time’ (1986a) and ‘A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident’ (1986b) for a discussion of these themes. See also Hélène Cixous Coming to Writing (1991a) and Rootprint (1997) for a different psychoanalytic engagement with writing, exile and subjectivity. Some important feminist writings on exile can be found in Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram’s collection Women’s Writing in Exile (1989). See also Caren Kaplan’s essay ‘Deterioratizations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse’ (1987)

² The Oxford English Dictionary (1992) defines the ‘foreign’ in a similar fashion. As I write from the Australian context, I choose to use the example from the Australian Macquarie Dictionary. Importantly, the concept of the foreign as outside and other to a community tends to be universally portrayed. But, as I will explore throughout, how the foreign is understood depends on the different ways it is legislated and written into the narratives of a nation.
abject blur the boundaries between inside and outside, the symbolic and cultural borders of a society.3

From this vantage point, strangers are disturbing because they can be both friends or enemies — they rupture the clear differentiations between self and other. Strangers are threatening as their difference blurs what is considered as ‘proper’ in the nation. Physical, linguistic and cultural strangeness disturbs the borders of the nation-state.4 It is here that xenophobia — the internal fear of others manifests in communities. For Bauman xenophobia and the abjection of others are interrelated. It is the ambivalent status of the foreigner that poses the threat to the community through the production of undecidability, difference, strangeness.5 In this way, as the site of ambivalence, the stranger haunts the community and its bonds.

Clearly, as Bauman writes, the foreigner is the site of ambivalence in contemporary modes of identification and communal life. But how do we understand the condition of being foreign? In the contemporary experience of migration and cultural displacement, foreignness is about being outside and within a community. It can be understood as the sense of being and belonging that traverses different cultural, political and national boundaries and the spaces in-between. It is important to articulate the spaces ‘in-between’ where foreignness, as Homi Bhabha aptly puts it, ‘the challenge to deal not with them/us [distinction] but with the historically and temporally disjunct positions that minorities occupy ambivalently within the nation’s space’ (1996: 57). Hence, foreignness can be understood within the terms of these kinds of historical and temporal disjunctures. In this respect the foreigner exists ‘out of time’ just as the historical and cultural articulations of difference exist outside the inside of the nation and its history. But if we can take the concept of history and move it to discuss a notion of historicity, there can be the recognition of foreigners, their different pasts and different presents in the making of history.6

Foreignness, as it is understood here, exists between the social and cultural positioning of being placed outside and the condition of being foreign — the lived experience of otherness. In this thesis, I want to trace how foreignness is always already embedded in concepts of self and other. That is, foreignness exists between and within what is considered as natural or proper in a language, nation or community. In this way, foreignness concerns a familiarity and strangeness that exists within a language, community or country of ‘origin’. For example, what appears as natural in the nation is shaped by the social and cultural languages that produce the foreign — and it is these processes

3 See Julia Kristeva Powers of Horror (1982a) for a discussion of abjection and the self across a range of cultural, religious and literary texts.
4 See Iris Marion Young Justice and The Politics of Difference (1990) for a discussion of the link between xenophobia and abjection.
5 There are various models for exploring ‘difference’. Bauman draws on the work of Jacques Derrida to explore how ambivalence and excess structure notions of ‘difference’ in the nation. See Derrida Of Grammatology (1976) and Margins of Philosophy (1982a) for detailed discussions of difference, excess and philosophical writing.
6 See Friedrich Nietzsche ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ (1983) and Michel Foucault ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ (1993a) for a discussion of this notion of historicity, and the idea of history as a constructed and fictional representation of ‘truth’. See Martin Heidegger Being and Time (1993a) and ‘Building Thinking Dwelling’ (1993b) for a notion of history as a kind of calling forth of reality and the uncanny nature of existence.
that often escape dominant representations of self and cultural belonging.

But perhaps the difficulty that the foreigner provokes in the nation lies in the challenge to move outside of fixed notions of self and other. Julia Kristeva has argued that ‘living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of being an other. It is not simply — humanistically — a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of being in his place, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself’ (1991: 13). It is this interrelationship of being able to place oneself outside of one’s own context and to imagine other ways of being that open up the possibility of seriously engaging with questions of identity and difference within the nation.

But the experience of the foreigner takes on multiple forms and cultural realities. As Trinh T. Minh-ha has argued, foreignness is a space of confinement and a space of non-conformity. She writes that ‘it is difficult to be a stranger, but it is even more so to stop being one’ (see Part Two, ch. 4). It is the gaps in-between being and belonging, the space of confinement and the space of non-conformity, that produce foreign life. Similarly, Maurice Blanchot writes about the stranger as this contradictory relation:

Who is the stranger? There is no adequate definition here. He comes from somewhere else. He is well received, but received according to rules he cannot submit to and which in any event put him to the test — take him to death’s door. He himself draws the “moral” from this and explains it to newcomers: “You’ll learn that in this house it’s hard to be a stranger. You’ll also learn that it’s not easy to stop being one. If you miss your country, every day you’ll find more reasons to miss it. But if you manage to forget it and begin to love your new place, you’ll be sent home, and then, uprooted once more, you’ll begin a new exile”.

Exile is neither psychological or ontological. The exile cannot accommodate himself to his condition, nor to renouncing it, nor to turning exile into a mode of residence (1985: 66).

What is explored throughout the thesis, then, is the ontology and epistemology of foreignness, taken as a movement between the spaces of being and the experiences of belonging. And it is within this space of being and belonging that the movement and travels of the foreigner can be understood. Significantly, as Martin Heidegger has argued in Identity and Difference (1969), ontological reality exists through the notion of being and belonging. For Heidegger, difference is at the heart of being and it is the mediations between being and belonging that constitutes identity. In Heidegger’s writing, the experience of dwelling emerges through and within language, but difference as the site of being, escapes metaphysical concepts of identity. Just as Heidegger articulates difference at the heart of identity, I will argue foreignness and the gaps ‘in-between’ are constitutive of

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7 Raymond Williams Keywords (1983) sketched how experience has been employed and used in Anglo-American contexts. His writing introduced how experience involves a way of ‘articulating truth’. See Elspeth Probyn Sexing the Self (1993) for a discussion of Williams and the need to extend the question of experience through gendered and racialised subjectivity. See Joan Scott ‘Experience’ (1992) for an elaboration of how ‘experience’ itself is socially and culturally constructed. See also Teresa de Lauretis Alice Doesn’t (1984) for her analysis of experience, subjectivity and sociality.

8 One can argue that Derrida’s deconstruction of metaphysics and his concept of différence emerges from Heidegger’s interrogations into the ontology of western thinking.
identity and the experience of belonging.

Through a series of conversations and dialogic encounters between myself, Australian and international writers and intellectuals, I explore foreignness in different cultural and theoretical contexts. Through dialogue and conversation there has been the opportunity to speak and engage with these writers' works on personal and theoretical levels. And, it is dialogue itself that provides this possibility: Nikos Papastergiadis cites Tristan Tzara’s secret, 'The thought is made in the mouth' (Papastergiadis, 1998: xi). My questions and meditations into foreignness traverse the field of foreign experience and its theoretical possibilities through an exploration of how different writers and intellectuals experience their own foreignness, and the ways this resonates across their writing and critical work. In the conversations I have with them we 'speak' issues around foreignness in local and global contexts to challenge an easy relationship to identity, and to examine the intersections of life history, writing and cultural production across a range of experiences.

Before I discuss the relationship between foreignness, dialogue and the different layers of 'translation' that have made this thesis possible, I will discuss some of my own encounters with foreignness that frame my theoretical concerns and writing. These encounters are about the on-going relationships between myself and others — the complex negotiations of the foreign, the familiar, and the strange ways in which foreignness is situated in different writing practices and cultural realities.

II

Coming to Writing/Coming to Home

For the foreigner, there is a constant shuttling between past and present lives, the traversing of different linguistic, cultural and political spaces. The experiences of place and belonging often exist through contingent and on-going relations between languages and cultures. Growing up in Australia, my sense of identity is ruptured by images that I dream about another place, a ghost-written memory that frames my writing. This other sense of place is mediated by my parents' migration from Egypt to Australia. In my formative years, the narratives and stories about Egypt were tempered by a strange nostalgia for Greece. The strange twists of nostalgia and concepts of place are mediated through different memories, different pasts. Being Egyptian Greek, my parents experience a double displacement: home for them is Greece — a place they have never really inhabited. Between

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9 The significance of the dialogic mode has emerged in some recent feminist writings. See Ruth Frankenberg White Women, Race Matters (1993) for her analysis of whiteness using life histories and conversation as her methodological and theoretical practice. See Hélène Cixous Rootprints — Memory and Life Writing (1997) for an example of how she uses dialogue and conversation to explore the history of her work and writing. See also Nikos Papastergiadis Dialogues in the Diasporas (1998) for an example of how the dialogic mode has informed and transformed his thinking and critical writing. Frankenberg, Cixous and Papastergiadis have given me the faith to pursue a critical investigation into dialogue, conversation and theoretical practice.

10 I have explored the notion of writing and memory elsewhere in 'Historical Fictions, Uncanny Homes' (1998b).
Egypt, where they were born, and Australia where they settled, they are always identifying with an imaginary Greek home-land.

For me, Greece and Egypt have always been mediated through a here, there and elsewhere. There is a certain intimacy with Greece, because of my close proximity to a Greek language and culture, but I have never been to Greece, nor can I properly speak the language. It is the significance of 'Greece' as an imagined place that interweave my parents' and my own different points of contact and relationship with a Greek culture and language. And it is through different kinds of intimacy and distance that I can frame and retell my multiple senses of belonging.

I remember my mother used to tell me stories about the ḥoroi in Egypt. Before migrating, the ḥoroi was where my mother and father lived. Whenever I heard these stories, I translated the ḥoroi as 'night club'. I thought my parents lived in a night club. I imagined the frontiers of my parents' former life: they were huddled in a hot and noisy room on top of a night club; sounds of people, air filled with smoke and humming fans travelled through the cracks in the floor to (re)create a life of turmoil, danger and excitement. Somehow they lived the life of 'cosmopolitans' in the heart of a strange country called Egypt.

Like a memorable film noir sequence, the night club image was etched into my memory by numerous black and white photographs I came across of my parents drinking and smoking with friends. I traced my family's journeys in the 1940s and 1950s through these images — the black and white photographic frames of another time and place. As I grew older, the image of the ḥoroi grew and became more distinctive. In this imagined life, the historical reality of nationalism in Egypt, my parents' socio-economic status and the traumas of migration settled into the background.

Coming to Australia was a forced decision for my parents. With the rise of Arab nationalism in Egypt under President Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, the invitation for migrants to come to countries like Australia, provided an arena of hope and possibility. Migrating in the hope for a better life, my parents arrived in official camps for migrants, lived in the inner city slums of Sydney for a few years, and then moved out to a suburban quarter acre block which was the Australian dream of the 1960s: fully equipped with a fibro house, a hillshoist and memories of other lands.

The images of the ḥoroi in Egypt that were conjured up in memory and my parents' life in Australia seemed very remote from each other — but it was through our different encounters with time and place that the stories about the past infiltrated and created meaning in our present lives. The ḥoroi and the imaginary maps of this place were constituted through my present with no knowledge of the past, but for my parents it was the past calling forth and resonating the memories of the ḥoroi in the present. As Gaston Bachelard (1994) has noted, images that call us forth are evoked through the resonating sounds of memory, and these are what take 'root' in us and open onto the
spaces of imagination. The blue and yellow fibro house we lived in in the outer suburbs of Sydney, stark in its blueness tracing a path that imitated the sun and Aegan sea of Greece, distilled these experiences. It was only many years later that I found out that *horoi* meant 'village' in Greek. *Horoi* literally means something smaller than the polis — a place that exists outside the main city. From outside the spaces of my imagination, my mother had told me over many years stories about life in an Egyptian village. It was perhaps in the disjuncture between my 'real' and my imagined home that I felt the intensity of foreignness — of worlds colliding and of the radically different memories and experiences that shape notions about place and identity.

The *horoi* was one of the many stories and (mis)translations that marked the different relations to language, meaning and identity within and between our histories. The significance of this story relayed how the passage between languages was fundamental to my experience of self and understanding of the past, and how particular textures of language, of meaning and memory evoke the spaces of imagination and of my writing. The *horoi* has situated for me the ways narratives about place and concepts of belonging involve disjunctures in time and cultural experience. In this domain, it has been most profoundly played out in the arena of language: of inhabiting neither my (m)other tongue, which is Greek, nor English, my second language and the language of the country which I was born into — a language that I never feel at home in. This experience of language reverberates across my body and my tongue; in English I feel the spectral haunting of a foreign syntax and grammar which often veils my thoughts and sense of belonging. Moreover, the image of the *horoi*, in its duplicity, is an example of the spoken translations about place, the languages we speak and hear in our different navigations through Greek and Australian culture. It reflects the basis of our communication in daily, banal ways, which relays the tensions and struggles between my own sense of a Greek culture and my parents' life. When I try to speak the languages of my parents I feel like I exist within the silent gap between English and Greek. The voice I try to find gets caught in my throat and as I try finding a language to communicate about the past, present and future I stumble through Greek and my parents stammer in English.

My experience of migration, then, is that of a generation grappling with intercultural and transgenerational struggles — trying to find a place to speak these experiences of strangeness and of being foreign. The disparate generational experiences involve a complex negotiation of different psychic and social realities. Some of these generational and intercultural issues are brilliantly portrayed in the work of Christos Tsiolkas. His fictional works *Loaded* (1995) and *The Jesus Man* (1999a) canvass the struggles between Greek migrants and their children, and pertinent issues of sexuality, identity and intercultural racism. For Tsiolkas, being gay in the Greek-Australian community has involved trying to find a mutual language to communicate to his parents and the community about ethical values, sexuality, gender and something called the 'family'. Trying to find that mutual language to

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11 See Gaston Bachelard *The Poetics of Space* (1994) for an interesting and important discussion of memory, image-making and writing. Later, in this thesis, I discuss his notion of time and memory.
communicate between and across the immigrant generations and the tensions of belonging reflect both his struggles and my own struggles to relay the ambivalent and strange relations to both Greek and Australian culture.\textsuperscript{12}

In a separate dialogue I undertook with Tsiolkas called ‘Spectres of Place’ (1999b), we recorded and discussed his short story, ‘In the Jewish History Museum’.\textsuperscript{13} The story portrays anti-Semitism in Greek cultural memory and the tensions of cultural differences. In this story and through our dialogue we explored the spectre of Europe for Greek migrants, and the legacies of European history that has framed ‘our’ experience, and yet distant from the present experience of living in a country such as Australia. The questions that emerged were around what kind of responsibility lies for a generation dealing with the horrors of Europe and the histories of violence and colonisation in Australia? How do you come to terms with these histories, when you feel too exiled from the past and exiled in the present? How do you position yourself as foreign to indigenous histories and other historical displacements in Australia?

Christos Tsiolkas’ work resonates with the burdens of history and memory that I take up throughout the dialogues with the different writers and intellectuals in this thesis. Moreover, his exploration of ‘Greekness’ has posed questions and issues for me in recent dialogues I have had with myself. Just as Tsiolkas is trying to find a language to speak across the immigrant generations, he is also trying to find a language to explore the complexity of new forms of class and migrant experience.\textsuperscript{14} As he notes, this complexity is especially obvious when you move out of, and beyond, the class and migration experiences of your family (Tsiolkas, 1999b). In my case, it has been moving out of a ‘working’ class migrant background and being interpellated into the ‘middle class’ — by virtue of my cultural capital and education — that enact these complexities and tensions between classes. The pains and straddleings of these experiences within one family are often difficult to put into words, as the language itself is fraught with blockages and vested differences. Because as I try to articulate foreignness in my writing, my parents continue to live the difficulty of being foreign, working class and semi-literate.

In this sense, there is a complex negotiation and manoeuvring of class, language and identity between migrants and their children. To give an example of this, my car is the focus of displaced anxieties around class and language. My car is an old 1974 Torana — a symbol in many ways of the

\textsuperscript{12} Another Australian writer, Anna Couani explores her experience of Greekness and Australianness through her fiction writing. Couani is a third generation Australian writer, whose writing challenges dominant assumptions about ‘migrant’ life. See Anna Couani The Train (1983), ‘Souvenir’ (1987) for examples of her transgenerational and intercultural writings. See also Sneja Gunew ‘Home and Away — Nostalgia in Australian (Migrant) Writing’ (1988) for a discussion of these themes and Couani’s work.

\textsuperscript{13} ‘Spectres of Place’ was a radio feature and dialogue written and produced by myself, for Radio Eye, ABC Radio National, September 1999. Tsiolkas ‘In the Jewish History Museum’ is an excerpt from a larger work in progress called Dead Europe.

\textsuperscript{14} For an interesting essay on new ways of speaking about class, sexuality and difference see Christos Tsiolkas ‘A Capitalist Faggot at the end of the Millennium — Musings on the disappointments of politics’ (1999c).
‘working class’ in Australia claiming their own commodity and identity, and doubly so for my parents, where they had really made it, because the car was bought new by mother and it typified a certain Australian iconography. In our conversations, we fight about the car, who is going to repair it and who it really belongs to. We speak to each other in opposing and contradictory languages, but the car itself becomes the medium of our exchange and communication. The space between us marks our different interpellations into Australian culture — where the car is the medium of these struggles. The affective cost of this is an attempt to bridge the gap of our different realities through this seemingly neutral medium of exchange. This straddling of classes and cultures has involved a reinvention of myself, which in many ways has reframed my own experience in relation to these dialogues. But the intricacies of this reinvention and the possibility of talking about new modes of class across and between immigrant generations is a project that I will continue elsewhere.

Significantly, though, when I was young the intersections of class and foreignness conditioned our lives in tacit and unspoken ways. The suburb where my parents, settled Mount Druitt, was one of the growing urban centres where working class people could ‘own’ their homes. For my parents this provided a way to live out their hopes of a better life and future for themselves and for their children. But interestingly the fate and dream of this urban landscape had another history that I was oblivious to while growing up there. Recently I had a conversation with a Koori woman who had grown up a decade earlier in Mount Druitt. In this conversation, she discussed her experience of the suburb and her different relationship to place and belonging. It was the very process of urbanisation and the building of these kinds of urban centres that led to many Aboriginal peoples being displaced and forced off ‘their communities and land’. The Aboriginal presence was never figured in the history and stories of this new frontier urban settlement. In this erasure of history, I realised my own complicity in assuming that the suburb was built on ‘unoccupied land’. But it also signalled the violence that structures the ways we can perceive reality and write about history.

Growing up in the midst of a working class Australian neighbourhood, to be safe in the community meant assimilating (by which I mean finding ways to be less visibly different) or denying your ‘difference. In my case, wanting to assimilate led to a whole process of denial about, and antagonism to, my Greekness, and a certain embarrassment about my parents, their language and ‘strange’ cus-

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15 In my essay, ‘Historical Fictions, Uncanny Homes’ (1998b) I talk about the way my mother continually gives me souvenirs of Australia. The giving of these souvenirs is a medium of communication and exchange between my mother and myself which designates the strange manifestations of cultural belonging, and enacts the intimate and distant relations between my mother and my own multiple experiences of place and belonging.
16 I have begun preliminary research around this theme. The project’s working title is ‘Hope — Revolution and Revolt in the New Millennium’. It is another series of collaborative radio dialogues and conversational essays with different writers and thinkers — on notions of hope, language, class and identity.
17 The history of Australia’s colonisation attests to this: the notion of ‘Terra Nullius’, empty land, led the early colonisers to occupy Australia’s country by annihilating the Aboriginal presence, and their claims to land and place. The continuing debates around a possible Australian ‘republic’ and the preamble to our constitution which includes prior recognition of Aboriginal ownership may, symbolically at least, enable serious cultural and political discussions of the past and the present reality of indigenous people.
toms. One year at an ethnic food day organised by my school, I turned up with a Scottish bagpipe record and a box of shortbread. Somehow I thought that this would make me more palatable to my friends and teachers. On other occasions, I would tell my friends that I was really from 'Switzerland' because this seemed the most neutral and white of European places. During this phase I dyed my hair blond and tried to convince everyone that I was really 'white'.

These kinds of experiences are also discussed in the work of many contemporary writers. For example, George Alexander (1997) and John Conomos (1998), in different ways, have talked about how embarrassed they've felt when their Greek grandmothers, draped in black, picked them up from school. Such embarrassment led them to join other school children in making fun of their grandmothers, who came to them from another era and another place. It is these small moments of ethnicisation that leave marks on the body and across generations. Perhaps the hardest thing to capture in writing is precisely these moments of conflict, pain and suffering. These moments of pain that pass between migrants and their children often take years to heal, and in some cases, the pain lives on as a kind of silent suffering.

Another form of this assimilation took hold when, as a child, I started Anglicising my parents' foreign names. My father Spiros became Steven, my mother Youanna became Jean. My older sister, a few years earlier, had her first name changed from Paraskevi to Cheryl and years later, she made the full transition from Paraskevi Zournazi to Cheryl Jones. The mutation and mutilation of a name leaves one, as Eva Hoffman (1989) has noted, a stranger to oneself. This was no more strangely played out when I recently had dinner with my parents. In the final stages of compiling this research, I wanted to trace the 'origins' of my Greek family name. So over dinner I asked my parents, 'where does the name come from?' I was half expecting some grandiose journey back through the ages (maybe back to some mythical Greek time) and an explanation of the greatness of 'our' culture. But my thought was stopped in its tracks (so to speak) as I heard a strangely piercing laugh from across the room. My brother wandered in and said, 'Zournazi means "to be a little bit mad — to speak in tongues"'. This speaking in tongues are the voices he hears in his head — voices that name him as schizophrenic — voices that resonate and reverberate through my life and writing.

But the strangeness of a name, the mutilations that are tied to nationalising the self to a com-

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18 See Ghassan Hage's book *White Nation* (1998) for a detailed discussion of 'whiteness' and multiculturalism. In some of the conversations the concept of whiteness is taken up and discussed. Importantly, for Sneja Gunew, the assimilation into a dominant form of whiteness leads to a certain loss of ethnicity for migrants (see Part One, Chapter Four and Part Two, ch. 7). Gunew elaborates this point in our radio conversation.


20 See Trinh T. Minh-ha's conversation in Part Two of this thesis for a discussion of the impact of the mutilations of a name in the denationalising of the emigré. See also Elaine K. Chang 'A Not So New Spelling of My Name: Notes toward (and against) a Politics of Equivocation' (1994).

21 The relationship between schizophrenia and 'translation', the migrant experience and the body of language are
munity and trying to occupy another body, another identity are subtleties that exist outside the inside of Australian culture. In this respect, it became obvious to me that there was an imagined community (to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term) that revolved around a certain notion of Australian national identity. It excluded the realities and the experiences I lived, which were intercut with violence and racism in daily ways — from verbal abuse to the physical defacement of my home. For example, I remember being called a wog and being told to ‘go home’. Such small, but symbolic and violent acts of racism intensified my feelings of otherness. Ironically, my street felt safer a few years later, when a Lebanese family moved in across the road and became the target of these kinds of racist taunts. Sometimes I would join my neighbours in hurling abuse at them.

The ‘problem’ the foreigner provokes in the nation still haunts the Australian psyche. In the fantasies of Australian nationhood, the ‘foreign’ is incorporated into an imaginary body politic, either to remain as ‘an assimilated’ body or an alien object to be expelled — the fate of those who do not fit the dominant fantasy model of Anglo-Celtic stories around national identity. This process of incorporation serves to ‘encrypt’ the foreign so as to seal off the possibility of communicating with the other and to reassure and reaffirm an imaginary state. This enacts a certain kind of melancholic loss where the foreigner becomes a ‘wound’ incorporated into the fantasy life of a nation. This wound serves to hide the ways in which foreigners are incorporated and creates certain kinds of longings for a coherent national community.

The shifting ideologies in Australia on the ‘foreign’ — from assimilationist policies, integration to multiculturalism have always involved an erasure of other histories, and a fantasy of national origin based on exclusion. The fantasy of exclusion is tied to a colonial history and a post-colonial experience of trying to come to terms with that history. For example, indigenous histories have always figured as outside of Australia's cultural imaginary, and this exclusion haunts ‘our’ stories and the search for ‘national origins’. Significantly, it is at the level of fantasy, and of storytelling, that we come to believe in a nation or community. As Michel de Certeau (1984) writes, ‘what makes us believe’ are the stories which speak on behalf of, not with others, these are the fictions that become ‘truths’ in a given social context. What this speaking for excludes from the domain of storytelling is other truths and historical realities, and the possibilities of ‘sharing’ in the fantasy life of a nation. In

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23 See Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok 'Mourning or Melancholia: Introduction versus Incorporation' (1994b) for a detailed discussion of incorporation and encryption. I discuss the point about encryption and incorporation in the Australian psyche through an examination of Tracey Moffatt’s film Bedevil (1993). See my article ‘The Queen Victoria of Bush Cuisine’: Foreign Incorporation and Oral Consumption within the Nation’ (1995).
24 For important discussions on the history of Australian multiculturalism see Stephen Castles et al Mistaken Identity (1992) and Jon Stratton Race Daze (1998).
the next two chapters, I take up the notion of how 'different citations' of experience and 'what makes us believe', intersects with critical writing practices.

III

Scars and Sutures: Nation writing and uncanny senses of belonging

As I suggested earlier, the everyday use of the word 'foreign' evokes the 'outside', the alien and the other. For Julia Kristeva (1991), the key to understanding foreignness, difference, otherness is to be found in the structure of psychic space, as it is in history. Employing the Freudian notion of the uncanny, Kristeva suggests that the foreign is integrated into a paradoxical logic of identity. Kristeva follows the significance of Freud’s concept of the uncanny and how the ‘proper’ always carries the other and the strange.

Freud (1990a[1919]) traced the etymology of the word the ‘uncanny’ or unheimlich — the unfamiliar, strange, secret, unhomely — in relation to its opposite, heimlich, which evokes home, intimacy and belonging. For Freud, the uncanny has its roots in the concept of Home (Heim), so that the familiar and unfamiliar inhabit, and circulate within each other. In this way, the concept of the foreign circulates and inhabits any notion of the ‘proper’ and visions of homeliness. Moreover, this uncanny strangeness indicates the possibility of the reversibility of time in the circulation of everyday narratives. That is, the movement backwards and forwards in the configuration of different experiences of ‘home’ and belonging. For Kristeva, this notion of the uncanny at a cultural and political level, suggests how the foreign exists outside what is considered as ‘natural’ and ‘proper’ in the nation. But, at the same time, the foreign inhabits the secret, unheimlich languages of nationhood. It reveals something that is strangely familiar in the proliferation of writing and the production of national texts. This uncanny notion, where the strangely familiar exists outside the inside of the nation, haunts the writing of history and stories of the nation.

For Kristeva, this uncanny and paradoxical logic of identity can be understood through the legal and political constraints imposed on the foreigner. That is, how the foreigner exists as outside, and external to, those who are considered as ‘native’ and proper in the nation. Kristeva argues this is distinctively expressed through the philosophical and political distinction between the ‘rights of man’ and that of citizens (1991: 95-104). In this distinction, Kristeva asks the question: is the foreigner a citizen or a man? Or neither? What the foreigner represents is a scar at once joining and conveying

25 It is perhaps, as Kristeva notes, Freud’s own feeling of being a stranger or xenos — of being a German Jew that situates the importance of this work in considering the place of the foreign in aesthetic, psychoanalytic and political texts. But, strangely enough, Freud never mentions the foreigner in his uncanny speculations of life and psychical belongings.

26 In Kristeva’s Strangers to Ourselves (1991) the analyses and thoughts on this distinction draw on the work of Hannah Arendt and the latter’s meditations on the rights of man, and what this concept precludes in a period of mass migration and cultural displacement forced and imposed by the rise of fascism and the modern nation-state.
the scission between the rights of man on the one hand, and the rights of citizens on the other. In this sense, Kristeva argues that the very distinction between man and citizen situates the foreigner as necessarily defined by state and political legislation. Consequently, the foreigner falls outside of a nation yet, at the same time, is internal to the very logic and construction of nationhood. For example, it is the foreigner who exposes at once the boundaries of citizenship and the rights of man, and that neither citizen or man is a 'natural category'.

The metaphor of the scar represents the site where the foreign ruptures dominant conceptions of the self and nation. The scar both enables and prevents a 'clear separation between myth and reason, the archaic and the modern, affect and law, same and other' (Ziarek, 1995: 3). The foreigner, then, fractures the imagined unity of the national body. In Australia, the foreigner inhabits the space of the multicultural and it is from this place that the foreigner ruptures and unsettles Australia's imaginary borders. Both the 'migrant' as the foreigner, and Aboriginal peoples as 'foreign' to the white Australian imaginary, produce this scarring effect. Foreigners are the scars on the nation's psyche: they interrupt the smooth cultural and political surface of the national community. And, as a consequence, their experiences circulate and inhabit spaces outside of the 'official' histories of national belonging.

The scar marks the cultural and affective wounding that the foreigner produces and experiences in the nation. It marks the cuts and joins where subjectivities and historical realities meet. For example, the scar imprints onto the body (politic) the memory and place of the other, like a wound on the body that leaves its mark — tissue, fibre and skin — forever radically altered. In a sense, the scar is the record of the passage of the other. It maps the 'route' or passage of the foreign, and how the native and foreign are legislated by the strange and uncanny languages of a community.

The scar functions metaphorically as the uncanny place of the other. It maps the surface and depth of foreign experience. Furthermore, the notion of the scar firmly places foreignness as constituted within the historical and social languages that stitch what is considered as foreign into the stories of national belonging. What I put forward is that the scar is a way of understanding how the foreign is written into national texts, but also how scarring is about a radical altering of notions of self and identity. For scarring evokes the different layers and memories that coexist within the nation, but also suggests the psychic and physical realities that the foreigner experiences.

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27 As Maria Angel pointed out to me this perhaps raises the question of whether human rights are founded at the failure of citizenship. See Kristeva's essay 'The Speaking Subject is Not Innocent' (1993a), for her discussion of the need to find a new definition of 'human' and the concept of human rights. Later, in Renata Salec's dialogue, the question of human rights is raised in relation to how the 'other' is viewed and understood by western liberal discourses.

28 See Gill Bottomley and John Lechte 'Difference, Postmodernity and Imagery in Multicultural Australia' (1993) for a discussion of how the multicultural can be seen as a way of being in the world that can be articulated through a notion of social practice.

29 See Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs 'Uncanny Australia' (1995). Gelder and Jacobs look at the uncanny to examine the socio-political tensions and possibilities that exist between Aboriginal peoples relation's to land and European conceptions of space, home and territory. For more detailed discussions of these themes, see their book Uncanny Australia (1998).
The metaphor of the scar evokes the on-going writing on the text of the nation and the experience of self. This notion of self is linked to a kind of uncanny strangeness that frames foreign modes of identification. This uncanny strangeness is precisely about being both outside and inside a place: the different ways other places and other histories haunt the languages we speak — about identity and belonging, here and now. It is a kind of ghosting that writes itself in the memories and stories of everyday life. In other words, there is an uncanny sense of belonging that is empirically tied to how one finds oneself located in different historical, social and political contexts.

In a different way, Stuart Hall (1996) discusses the formation of identity construction through a notion of suturing. The suture is literally a kind of stitching together of the edges of a wound or infliction of pain on a body. For Hall, the use of suture intersects the edges or the ‘junctions of the imaginary and the symbolic’ of language and of the social.\(^{30}\) It is through imaginary and symbolic junctures that unconscious and fantasy relations interpellate the subject into language and historical discourse. For Hall, suturing evokes the ‘effecting join’ that interpellates a subject in the economies of meaning and ideology that constitute particular social realities.\(^{31}\) This notion of identity refers to the ‘temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us’ (1996: 6). This relates to cultural, sexual and political identities that overlap and frame relations to power, meaning and the social.

Identity, then, is lodged in the ways power, inclusion and exclusion operate within given social contexts. The sense of self that emerges through these experiences is ‘conditional [and] lodged in contingency’ (Hall, 1996: 3).\(^{32}\) For Adam Phillips (1995), our experiences of self are based in contingency and this plays an important role in understanding contemporary notions of subjectivity. If contingency is the basis of identity formation there is the possibility of freedom and transformation through the movement and fluidity of a self. As Phillips argues: ‘Given the obvious contingency of much of our lives — we do not in any meaningful sense intend or choose our birth, our parents, our bodies, our language, our culture[...] it might be worth considering[...] not only our relationships to ourselves and our relationships to objects, but (as the third of the pair, so to speak) our relationship

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\(^{30}\) See Stephen Heath’s essay ‘On Suture’ (1981) which explores the concept of suture through the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan and how suture can be linked to the ‘affective’ joins of cinema, narrative and ideology. Importantly the notion of ‘suture’ emerges from Lacan’s notion of the unconscious and the Other, the relations between the speaking subject and the articulation of being. For Lacan, the Other is linked to the social and cultural languages that speak through our unconscious. There could be no sense of being and self without the Other. Within the psychoanalytic framework, suture involves the dynamics of castration, language and the unconscious. See Lacan Écrits (1977) for a selection of his writings on the speaking subject, language and the unconscious. For some detailed discussions of suture, film theory and feminist interventions see Kaja Silverman’s essay entitled ‘Suture’ (1983) and her book The Acoustic Mirror (1988). See also Claire Johnston ‘Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses’ (1976) and Leslie Stern ‘Point of View: The Blindsport’ (1979).

\(^{31}\) Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation frames this part of Hall’s argument. How subjects are interpellated into systems of power and ideology has been argued through numerous Marxist and post-structuralist traditions. For example, see Judith Butler The Psychic Life of Power (1997). Althusser’s model of interpellation indicates that as subjects we are ‘halled’ into discourses of power through ideological operations of the state. See Althusser’s essay ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1971).

\(^{32}\) See Adam Phillips ‘Contingency for Beginners’ (1995).
to accidents’ (1995: 9). In this sense, we can consider identities as a matter of becoming rather than simply articulated in being (Hall 1990, 1996). In other words, the relations between being and becoming are negotiated through the on-going movements of a subject within contingent social and political contexts.

The relationship between foreignness and cultural identification involves the on-going negotiation between disparate imaginary and symbolic structures. In this sense, foreignness is not constructed from some essential moment of psychic history. Rather it is the strangeness experienced in different psychic and cultural realities that produces senses of self and belonging. In a way, this kind of uncanny strangeness can be seen as the ‘paroxysmic metaphor of the psychic functioning itself’ (Kristeva, 1991: 184). But loss is often the prevailing mode for discussing how foreigners are configured within the nation and how they experience themselves. That is, foreign experience is often discussed as the loss of some prior ‘essence’ or identity. But as it will become evident throughout this thesis and the dialogues, ‘loss’ is one element in the configuration of the psychic and social life of the foreigner. The question of power and subjection mobilised around the trope of loss is an important issue, but I want to suggest that being and senses of belonging are mediated by the negotiations and cultural translations that occur in the on-going production of foreign identity.

Throughout the thesis, the spaces of imagination and the condition of being foreign are framed through ambivalent and often paradoxical encounters with different social and historical realities. So the question, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has argued, is no longer: ‘who am I’ or ‘what language should I abide by?’, but rather ‘which self?’ ‘which language?’ and ‘when, where and how am I?’ (see Part Two, ch. 4). In this regard, the notion of identity and experience of foreignness that are evoked here are not essentialist, but rather explore the ‘tactical and positional’ relations to being and belonging.

What I want to suggest is that in the writing and representation of foreignness, the scar and suture interweave, metaphorically, those in-between spaces where the lived experience of the foreigner is written into different national texts. As Roland Barthes (1994) has argued, the interrelation between texts and bodies as a kind of stitching together of tissue involves a perpetual interweaving

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33 See Maurice Blanchot The Writing of Disaster (1988a) for way to think and write the ‘accident’ and disaster. In this book, Blanchot tries to find a language to speak the ‘unspeakable’ silence of accidents and disaster.

34 For Julia Kristeva, the ‘speaking subject’ is always a subject-in-process.


36 See Judith Butler Gender Trouble (1990) for her criticisms of ‘identity politics’. For Butler identity is lived and performed. If we understand identities as a ‘practice’ rather than as fixed and static in form, then Butler argues, ‘historically specific organisations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting the unpredictable and inadvertent convergences’ (1990: 143) within and outside of a community.
and transformation of meaning and subjectivity. In a similar way, scars radically alter the body — the tissues of a text, and the notion of suture interweaves the edges or margins where identities can be spoken from. In this context, scars and sutures are the embodied places where history and writing join. These embodied places in which we speak or write from, as Hall and Barthes remind us, are never identical to the 'subject who is spoken of'. Because the relationship, as Barthes (1989) and Threadgold (1997) have argued, between the 'I' that speaks and the subject that is spoken can never be 'innocently restored'.

In the relationship between writing and cultural texts, Roland Barthes (1987) has noted that the figure of the author returns as a guest to haunt the margins of a text. Perhaps, then, foreigners, as unwanted guests, and authors of different scripts, haunt the internal workings of the 'text' of the nation. That is, through the writing of different kinds of memories and historical relations, foreigners disrupt the authoring of national texts. How does the foreign come back, like the unwanted guest, to haunt the internal workings of the nation? Throughout the conversations recorded and discussed in the second part of this thesis, the question of how the foreign comes back to haunt traverses the thesis in a multitude of ways. And through acts of storytelling we engage with different ideas, arguments and theorising on foreignness. I suggest the notion of storytelling is an important critical practice. Because, as Threadgold has argued, if we accept in the post-modernist context that 'stories are told from some body's position', and that stories can be rewritten, then we must accept that 'stories are theories, and they always involve a metalinguistic critique of the stories they rewrite' (1997: 1)

The stories and anecdotes told, then, are about the often uneasy experience of being 'in-between', both outside and within a community, language or culture. This resonates with my own experiences of being outside the inside of Australian culture which are relayed through and by the stories of others. My point is to give meaning to these experiences through individual, political and aesthetic collaborations, as articulated in the conversations and their textual sediments in this thesis.

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37 See Maria Angel's PhD Thesis Textual Forensics: Vision, Death and the Writing Subject (1997) for a discussion of how tissues, texts and bodies are interconnected in the writing of truth, subjectivity and meaning in the authorisation of knowledge. See also Alan Bass' introduction to Jacques Derrida's Writing and Difference (1978a). In this introduction, the notion of text, tissue and textile as interwoven in Derrida's writing is explored. Bass notes that Derrida's book can be read as a kind of tissue or textile weaving: '[...] these essays always affirm that the "texture" of texts makes any assemblage of them a "basted" one, i.e., permits only the kind of fore-sewing that emphasizes the necessary spaces between even the finest stitching' (1978a: xiv).

38 In a different context, Jacques Derrida discusses that in writing and representation: 'we should have to study together [...] the history of the road and the history of writing' (1978b: 214). If we consider these intersections, then, we can map other representations of writing and foreignness.

39 In Part One, Chapter Two I will discuss and develop the relationship between subjectivity and narration.
Situated Multiplicities

What is critical, then, in this investigation into foreignness is how psychic and social realities are voiced across different experiences and cultural reflections. I develop an argument on how foreignness can be written into critical theory and cultural practice by giving foreigners a voice in two senses of the term — through dialogue and in the practice of writing, theirs and mine. Through interlocutions we ‘speak’ the embodied places of foreignness — not simply from the outside, but from within and between. If we have learnt anything from Michel Foucault’s genealogical project, the focus on partial, localised and embodied practices is a strategy to contest universalising theories. And, indeed, Donna Haraway (1991) has argued that ‘partial’ and situated knowledges are the embodied places from which we speak. Moreover, these places provide points of intersection and objectivity for thoughtful feminist intervention into critical research and inquiry. As Haraway notes: ‘embodied objectivity [...] accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges’ (1991: 188).

The importance of finding a voice through which to speak foreignness has involved a number of transpositions and translations of myself, across and between different disciplinary frameworks and cultural understandings. In forming this discussion around voice, I came back to reading Nicole Ward Jouve’s preface in White Woman Speaks with Forked Tongue (1991). In this preface, Ward Jouve explains her process of writing between and across two languages. For Ward Jouve, it is the process of translation, translating across and between different disciplinary frameworks, and cultural modes that a writing self emerges in the context of critical practice. Ward Jouve positions herself as white, middle class and privileged and she posits the tensions and contradictions of this writing self through a notion of a ‘forked tongue’. ‘White Woman’, she says, ‘speaks with forked tongue’. Significantly, she wishes to find a ‘critical’ voice which can speak across two languages, letting her French and English interfere and exist between her theoretical, autobiographical and fictional modes of writing. For my part, I move and try to find a language and voice somewhere in-between Greek and English, the languages that frame my sense of self. As I try to find a critical voice, to be true to myself — and I mean ‘truth’ here as an on-going movement and changing form of self — I write between the academic, poetic, critical and autobiographical.

Significantly finding a critical voice through the oral/aural medium was a ‘tactical’ process, a form of inspiration and lucidity for me, a way of speaking identity through the questions I was posing to myself through the work of others. And, Michel de Certeau has argued, ‘tactics’ provide the possibility of heterogeneous intersections of space and time. The space of the tactic, he argues, ‘is the space [and time] of the other’ (1984: 37). Following Michel de Certeau I take up the notion of ‘oral-
ity' as a kind of tactical process, and I will develop the point later in Chapter Three when I discuss the conversations as translations from speech to writing.\(^{40}\) For the moment, what de Certeau offers is a way of analysing the act of speaking and its practice, through the way language operates within a field or linguistic system of effects.\(^{41}\) Importantly, there is a distinction that must be made between the writing practice and the act of speaking. Michel de Certeau (1984) has noted that writing has been invented through the centuries as a means to place an 'omnipotent subject' — one who writes but does not speak. The history of writing and historical discourse extracts the speaking person from language, and as a consequence, those who are spoken for, haunt the language that speaks for them.

For de Certeau, this is apparent in all 'scientific' discourse (anthropology, ethnography etc) that speaks on behalf of the other. In this move the sovereign individual becomes the author — the authoring subject of writing. In this transition, 'the author is not grasped corporeally in an interlocution' (1984: 157). In this process, where in its double movement of creating a new god the 'author' of knowledge, the question of 'speaking' comes back. De Certeau asks the question: 'who speaks when there is no longer a divine Speaker who founds every particular enunciation?' (1984: 156). But, as de Certeau notes, understanding this question comes from outside of this authoring practice. 'Something different', he argues, speaks again in the various forms of 'the savage, the madman, the child, even woman[...] One no longer knows where speaking comes from, and one understands less and less how writing, which articulates power, could speak' (1984: 158).

'Speaking' foreignness, then, in a kind of interlocutionary mode has given me a voice to translate and transform the theoretical practices of my own research. Taking this form, I make an attempt to see how writing can speak. In this sense, I have had to give myself over to the 'text' (to the transmutations of the conversations, interviews, dialogues) and learn how to hear and write differently, because the conversations moved between narrative and interview, and enacted a different mode of memory and writing. In these translations, through the theoretical and cultural practices of others, I was able to challenge and extend my own experiences and understandings of foreignness.\(^{42}\)

The questions, meditations and concerns elaborated in the dialogues to follow are about

\(^{40}\) Michel de Certeau makes an important distinction between 'tactics' and 'strategies' as modes of operation in aesthetic, cultural and political life. For de Certeau, the tactic is critical to resisting dominant forms of power and ideology whereas the use of strategic thinking and action reinforces power and ideological forces. De Certeau writes, 'I call a "strategy the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment". A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (proprié) and thus serves as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clientele", "targets", or "objects" of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model. I call a "tactic" on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on the "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a total visibility. The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety [...] because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time — it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the "wing" (1984: xix).

\(^{41}\) For a further development of speech, writing and politics see Michel de Certeau The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings (1974a).

\(^{42}\) In Part One, Chapter Three I discuss translation and the translation from speech to writing as a way of countering the 'authenticity' and sacredness of an 'interview' by poiting the passage between 'raw' data and the production of a conversation.
speaking' the in-between spaces of foreign life. In a way, this project explores these in-between spaces where the pains, pleasures and complexities of foreign life emerge through different writing practices and political engagements. Perhaps another way of putting this is to explore the imaginary capacities involved in writing and thinking oneself outside of oneself. This imaginary capacity involves a movement of empathy, as Eva Hoffman has noted, 'a kind of leaping out of yourself' (see Part Two, ch. 1). Empathy allows one to move out of purely subjective relations and experience, and into the realm of others.

In this regard, Nikos Papastergiadis has argued, empathy can serve as a concept 'for the approach and the reception of the other in the formation of knowledge' (1993:15). As Papastergiadis suggests, the empirical and theoretical are intricately intertwined if we consider empathy and 'poetics' as a complex set of intersecting patterns and relationships that form the basis of representation and identity. Empathy, he notes, 'would[...] open a space which would facilitate a vigorous negotiation between the limits of the self and the beginnings of the other' (1993: 15). Furthermore, it would allow the capacity to think and imagine outside the parameters of the self which opens up the space for critical writing and cultural politics.

Tracing the possibility of this kind of otherness, these conversations see the individual writers come together in what could be called a 'community of those who have nothing in common'. This notion of community comes from Alphonso Lingis' (1994a) writing and our respective dialogue. Importantly, the notion of this kind of community emerges from the work of Georges Bataille, who tried to think 'the community of those who do not have a community' (cited in Blanchot, 1988b: 1). As Lingis argues, community is often thought of as a 'number of individuals having something in common — a common language, a conceptual framework — and building on something in common: a nation, a polis, an institution' (1994a: ix). What I suggest is that the community evoked here is based on a shared experience of otherness — individuals coming together to forge new ways of thinking community. That is, communities are made up of individuals who may have nothing in common but come together through their difference. In this virtual collaboration, most of the writers between these pages have not met, but they resonate and speak to each other through the dialogues — they are other for each other. It is precisely this meeting between the pages, so to speak, that structures the points of contact, commonality and difference. As Lingis (1994a)

43 I felt this notion of empathy most profoundly when watching Clara Law's film Floating Life (1995). Through different motifs of home, Law depicts the 'floating' lives of Hong Kong Chinese migrants in their journeys to and within Australia. While watching the film, I realised the film could be understood through empathy. During the film I could identify with the experience of 'home' and belonging depicted, and yet, it was the portrayal of a very different journey. In searching for a language to explain this reaction, I realised it evoked empathy as a kind of leaping out of yourself and into the 'place of the other'.

44 See Alphonso Lingis The Community Of Those Who Have Nothing In Common (1994a). See Maurice Blanchot’s The Unavowable Community (1988b) for a discussion of Bataille and community, and for a development of community based on what we do not have in common. See also Jean-Luc Nancy The Inoperative Community (1991), for a discussion of Bataille, community, 'shattered love' and relationships to the other.
argues 'real values are not what we have in common, but what individualizes each one and makes him or her other' (1994a: x).

Through this notion of commonality and difference, the thread or element that interweaves the individual works is the voicing of different autobiographical and writing practices. What will be explored in various ways throughout the conversations, is how the narration of one's life experience touches on certain elements in the politics and aesthetics of writing. It is the intersections between the politics of experience and its aesthetic production that produce, what I would call, a poetics of foreignness. This poetics takes the form of both enacting and inventing theories on foreignness. In this sense, what we speak about also informs the themes and concepts in this research and writing. So how these conversations and theoretical reflections came into being intersects with the themes of foreignness explored throughout the body of this work. But it was 'after the fact' so to speak that the themes, ideas and arguments that emerged in the conversations came together and produced my methodology of practice. As Maurice Blanchot writes in his essay, 'After the fact', the writer does not exist before a work nor do they exist after it, it is the work itself that produces the writer:

Prior to the work, the work of art, the work of writing, the work of words, there is no artist — neither a writer nor a speaking subject — since it is the production that produces the producer, bringing him to life or making him appear in the act of substantiating him [...] But if the written work produces and substantiates the writer, once created it bears witness only to his dissolution, his disappearance, his deflection and, to express it more brutally, his death, which itself can never be definitely verified: for it is a death that can never produce any verification. Thus before the work, the writer does not yet exist; after the work, he is no longer there: which means that his existence is open to question — and we call him an "author"! It would be more correct to call him an "actor", the ephemeral character who is born and dies each evening in order to make himself extravagantly seen, killed by the performance that makes him visible — that is, without anything of his own or hiding anything in some secret place (1985: 59-60).

Each of the conversations, then, in this kind of relationship between aesthetics and the politics of experience, explore the practice and production of foreign life. The conversations are organised as a relay of encounters between prominent Australian writers and expatriates, international writers and intellectuals. These writers come from very different backgrounds that move between different identities and speak the multiple positions of public life (some are writers, poets, others are intellectuals and film-makers, teachers and researchers). They cross over and speak at the interstices

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of different frameworks and disciplines: psychoanalysis, philosophy, literature, cinema studies, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, queer theory and feminist theory. Each of the writers, in their different ways, has been crucial to my thinking about foreignness and, as a passage through their different cultural practices, I develop a critical framework for ‘speaking’ foreignness.

Throughout the conversations discussed and presented here, the relationship between foreignness and gendered subjectivity emerges in a multitude of ways. But the main focus has been on the different transpositions and translations of being placed as outside and ‘foreign’ to a language, culture or nation, and how this intersects with the different writers’ experiences of cultural, sexual and political identities. In a similar way, we do not always directly speak about foreignness, but the conversations are pivotal in addressing the ontology and epistemology of foreign life — ways of thinking language, being and uncanny senses of belonging.

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I first encountered the works of the foreigners included here through their writing and these writings framed my discussions with them. For example, Eva Hoffman’s book Lost in Translation (1989) explores the experience of migration — through the different layers and translations of subjectivity, language and cultural belonging. Her work helped me frame some of the affective costs and bodily experiences of life in a new language; and the ‘stylings’ and translations of the body in different cultural contexts. That is, she raises the question of what it means to move into a new language and how that affects the psyche, memory and languages of the body.

I was drawn to Antigone Kefala’s poetry through its layering of language and texture of experience. Kefala’s writing evoked the images of inhabiting strange and foreign lands and her poem, ‘Memory’ (1992a), was the first encounter I had with a language that spoke directly to my experiences of Greekness, and of familial madness. Her words:

The streets were foreign in the dream.  
No one but us,  
and fountains in deserted squares under the rain.  
At night time. You small and vulnerable,  
complaining of some dark disease that emptied you.  
And I afraid. Taking you in my arms as if a child.  
Weightless[…]

Then from downstairs the echo of that foreign laugh  
would come, surprised and unsubstantial in the stillness,  
forced out of you by those black shadows  
no one could exorcise[…]

You had lost the image and the way,  
had lost now even the recollection of the way,  
and wandered through the broken walls,  
in that far country[…]

“They steal my time”, you said in a low voice[…]  
And who could say what they forced of you,
behind those walls. The essence maybe of our time,
dripping so slowly in our blood.
Maybe they stole the measure (1992a: 22-24)

This poetic image spoke silently but resonated deeply. Kefala’s work posed questions for me
about how to think a poetics and an ‘aesthetics of migration’: how can we talk about a minority writ-
ing and a different cultural aesthetics? What are some of the social and political issues at stake?46
Significantly, her mediations between Greek culture and language resonate with my own, and yet,
provide a different context, generation and autobiographical experience. Both Eva Hoffman and
Antigone Kefala’s experience of language and exile provided a way to explore the affective life of
writing. Furthermore, Hoffman and Kefala’s writings gave a certain depth and substance to my own
writing and thinking about the cross-cultural and transgenerational issues between migrants and
their children.

The question of language and exile, and the issue of being outside your ‘native’ language drew
me to the work of Jen Ang. Her text ‘On Not Speaking Chinese’ (1994), that deals with not speaking
the language of your ‘mother tongue’ and the issue of being inauthentic, provided a ‘foreign’ sense
and relationship to language, reality and cultural identity. Moreover, the complexities of belonging
and being ‘in-authentic’ raised important questions on national and cultural belongings both within
Australia and in global contexts. From a different vantage point, Elspeth Probyn’s book Outside
Belongings (1996) was crucial to me in thinking geo-political displacement, sexuality and multiple
senses of belonging. Her own experience of migration from Québec to Australia, and her medita-
tions on writing, memory and body provided ways for me to think about relations between embod-
iment and experience. That is, her work gave me a context to explore the ideas of lived experience
and the notion of bodily memory and writing.

Julia Kristeva’s diverse writings on foreignness, exile and subjectivity, in many ways, quintes-
sentially framed my interests and engagements with the subject of foreignness. Kristeva’s work pro-
vided ways for me to explore how foreignness is experienced in language and subjectivity. In partic-
ular, her book Strangers to Ourselves (1991), raised important issues on the foreigner and the experi-
ence of strangeness within the nation. Kristeva’s own experience of being a foreigner in Paris, helped
me to think about the relations between aesthetic, sexual and national belongings, and her intersec-
tions with psychoanalytic practice, fictional and theoretical work provided a way for me to think a

46 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have tried to think these questions through in their writing on Kafka and minor lit-
erature. As they argue: ‘How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even
know their own and know poorly the major literature that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants,
and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all
of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it
follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one’s own lan-
guage? Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope’ (1986:19). See Deleuze and Guattari, ‘What is a
Minor Literature’ (1986) from the book Kafka — Toward a Minor Literature for an extension of these issues on minority
writing.
poetics of foreignness.

In Renata Salecl’s book, *The Spoils of Freedom* (1994), the questions of multiculturalism, difference and identity within the nation took on another form and understanding. Based in Slovenia, her writing explores the complexities of identity and nationhood in a post-socialist world. Significantly, her discussion of fantasy, ideology and hate within the nation describes ways of reposing how identity and national belongings are imagined in western and post-socialist countries. Throughout Ang, Probyn, Salecl and Kristeva’s work, the importance of the nation and belonging are posed from outside and within the context of contemporary dilemmas of difference, identity and multicultural politics. These theoretical and critical concerns posed some ways to problematise an easy relationship to identity, and provided ways to discuss the complexities of the ‘new’ racisms emerging in local and global contexts.

Sneja Gunew writes on the complexities of belonging, the imaginary and real experiences of traversing different languages and cultures. Her thoughts, writing and mediations on the uncanny experience of belonging, and cultural identification, in many ways influenced how I came to writing, and began to explore the theme of foreignness and minority writing within the Australian context. Gunew’s sense of self and writing is influenced by her own ‘foreignness’ and growing up as a migrant daughter in Australia. Gunew’s work traverses the experience of language and identity and intersects with the layers of cultural translation that concern my interest in foreignness, writing and cultural belonging.

Denise Groves’ (1996) work on new Aboriginalities raised important themes of identity, ethics, aesthetics and cultural memory in the lives of different Aboriginal writers and artists. Her work on memory and contemporary Aboriginal aesthetic practices intersected with my own interests in trying to explore ways of thinking and writing cultural identity. Moreover, her experience of being placed outside of Australia’s ‘cultural’ history complicates an easy relation to place and identity. Her writing posed questions, in ways that reverberate with Ien Ang’s production of ‘in-authentic’ identity, and raised a different way of conceiving ‘whiteness’ in Australia’s national and cultural imagination.

Foreignness is put to work in the writing and cinematic practice of Laleen Jayamanne and Trinh T. Minh-ha. Jayamanne’s aesthetic and cinematic work raised important questions on the ‘non-recognition’ of self in writing and representation — her own traces of Sri Lankan and Australian identities. What are some of the methodological implications of not recognising one’s identity, voice and body? And, how does this get translated into cinematic memory and writing? Trinh T. Minh-ha’s writing and film work spoke a kind of ‘revolutionary’ poetics to me. Her writing and cinematic work disrupts dominant conceptions of identity and difference, and is achieved through poetical and musical forms. It is through her layered connections between different images and experiences that I have felt and perceived the possibilities of an aesthetics and politics of writing. In particular, her film A
Tale of Love (1995), explores Vietnamese diaspora by radicalising the relationship between image and writing, narrative and translation, and through these translations it resonates the possibilities of a different cultural aesthetics and ontology of being and belonging.

Alphonso Lingis’ books The Community of Those Who Have Nothing In Common (1994a), Abuses (1994b) and Foreign Bodies (1994c) combine personal experience and philosophical writing to explore the relationship between foreign bodies, language and cultural perception. I was drawn to his work on the body and the sensual and sonorous rhythms that exist in language and in concepts of being. These informed some ways of thinking the ontology of foreignness, and informed my sense of a community ‘of those who have nothing in common’. Lingis’ writing provided a context to explore some of the ethical implications of otherness in contemporary cultural and philosophical thought.

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What I have set out to explore through the methodological practice of dialoguing with writers and intellectuals is the interface of speaking and writing about foreignness. This involves the transposition and translation of different encounters with foreignness; and the production of the text of this thesis itself — the lively interchange between different languages, voices and cultural practices. It is through our dialogic encounters, the places of imagination and exchange, where multivocal experiences or a ‘polyphony’ of voices are staged. Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of the dialogic imagination is what is being evoked here.47 For Bakhtin, it is the different voices and ways of speaking that coexist and activate a dialogic imagination within a text. I take Bakhtin’s notion of a dialogic imagination one step further, and explore how dialogue itself can produce a critical imagination.48 I argue that it is the potential to listen to and hear the polyphony of voices that emerge in speaking and writing on foreignness that provide the scope of the imagination and the potential to contest and dialogue with others.49

These conversations emerge out of the notion of dialogic interchange and transformation. This thesis, then, is not based on the extraction and refutation of ideas, but rather on the mediation and translation between different thoughts, relationships and concepts, what I call a ‘net of relationships’ — the criss-crossing of different ideas, thoughts and languages on foreignness. Here I position

47 See Mikhail Bakhtin’s seminal work and essays in The Dialogic Imagination (1981).
48 Interestingly, Paul de Man’s criticism of Bakhtin is centred around the difference between dialogue and dialogism. For de Man, Bakhtin alludes to, but does not adequately develop, a notion of dialogue itself. See Paul de Man ‘Dialogue and Dialogism’ (1986a).
49 The notion of ‘contest’ is important. As Nikos Papastergiadis writes, the production and regulation of identity is always: ‘inflated in a context of power[…] identity is always a dialogue and/or contest with others’ (1998x). Clearly, then, the assertion of one’s point of view to counter another’s argument is a limited notion of genuine dialogue. Contestation involves, if you like, the ‘uncontested’ or the ‘unthought’. To contest, then, is the enunciation into discourse of what may be silent or the unthought in language in order to discuss the possibilities of other ways of seeing and knowing.
myself as the translator or mediator in discussing the interconnection and the dissemination of ideas on foreignness. Significantly, as Deleuze (1992) has argued, mediators are fundamental: 'Creation is all about mediators. Without them, nothing happens[...] Whether they're real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, one must form one's mediators' (1992: 285).

In the following chapters in Part One, I discuss my various roles as the mediator and translator in this thesis. Throughout Chapters Two and Three I discuss the poetics of foreignness and the methodology of this research practice. In Chapter Four, I discuss themes that interweave the different individual writers and my own thinking on foreignness, and the imaginative potential for writing, thinking and 'hearing' foreignness differently. Part Two enacts the poetics of this research, the conversations I had and their collaborative voicings of foreignness and the practice of writing. In the postscript, and as a supplement to this thesis, I revisit foreignness through the radio translations of these conversations, to enact another way of speaking and writing about foreignness, and to explore the on-going relationships between dialogue, translation and a critical imagination.
II A Poetics of Foreignness — A Methodology of Practice

The poet speaks on the threshold of being.
Gaston Bachelard, 1994: xvi

To read what was never written...
Walter Benjamin, 1986: 336

Sometimes one has to go very far.
Sometimes the right distance is extreme remoteness.
Sometimes it is in extreme proximity that it [a text] breathes.
Hélène Cixous, 1988: 35

I

Net of Relationships — Multivocal voices and the poetics of writing

The word dialogue derives from δία: between and through, and λόγος, the word. It is the passage between and through words that establishes the dialogic encounters that frame my speaking and writing about foreignness.¹ By enacting a dialogic imagination — the multivocal voices within the text and through the process of dialogue itself — I develop the possibility of exploring a critical imagination and the 'polyphony of voices' within a text. Following from Bakhtin (1981), this dialogic imagination informs the critical practices of my research.²

In order to explore this notion further, the framework and methodology of practice of this

¹ The notion of dialogue as between and through words is apparent in the conversations between David Bohm and J. Krishnamurti. See David Bohm and J. Krishnamurti The Ending of Time (1985). In this book, Bohm discusses the importance of scientific creativity through dialogic relations between science, nature and conceptual thought. See also Ann Game and Andrew Metcalfe Doing Nothing and Other Ways of Being (1999), for a discussion of the importance of dialogue as an 'in-between' space and in their creative collaborations.
² Later, in this discussion, I develop the notion of a dialogic imagination and the actual relationship to dialogues. Significantly, Julia Kristeva was one of the first theorists to introduce Bakhtin to a western audience, see Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language (1984), and 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' (1982b) for her analysis and discussion of dialogism through a notion of intertextuality. For an interesting and important discussion specifically on dialogue and dialogism within texts, see Tzvetan Todorov Mikhail Bakhtin — The Dialogical Principle (1984).
analysis and the conversations presented in Part Two of this thesis, involves a net of relationships that bring together a polyphony of foreign voices. It is a matrix of criss-crossing relationships between different writers and collaborators, and thoughts and ideas; and is the space of an ‘open’ text. The net weaves together the different threads of the text and the spaces in-between. It embraces the intersections of life, memory and writing that are interwoven throughout this thesis.

What the notion of a net of relationships evokes is the spatial layout of this text, bringing together a criss-crossing matrix of different tools, both conceptual and practical, that are used to think and write about foreignness. The range of positions and perspectives on foreignness discussed throughout the conversations invite both common and uncommon threads. As a conceptual ordering, then, a net of relationships is about a different sense of knowledge and its production. As Trinh T. Minh-ha argues:

Rather than having one centralised or hierarchised relationship to which everything else is subordinated[,] here a net of relationships, whose intensities are accented with precision and subtlety mainly to invite other markings and unmarkings. The ability to achieve this effortlessly comes with love and passion that one has for the “raw” material, the matrix from which things come together or apart, take shape and dissolve largely on their own accord (see Part Two, ch. 4).

The spatial layout of this critical analysis traces the (im)possibilities of different relations and ideas, the interconnections between and across various forms of writing and senses of belonging. In this way, it traces the possible relationships that can coexist at once through the layered textures of various writing and cultural practices. In some senses, it hinges on Foucault’s (1970) notion of a heterotopia — where the spatial configuration of a text involves different elements which can be placed alongside each other to produce the ‘impossibility of thinking that’. Foucault suggests that the placement of seemingly different and uncanny objects alongside each other enacts another ordering and spatial organisation of knowledge. While Foucault is challenging the epistemological production of western thought, I will examine more modestly, the interface between speaking and writing about

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3 See Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1970) for a detailed development and discussion of heterotopia. Foucault narrates how reading Jorge Luis Borges writing on a ‘certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ lead him to think of a different order of things — citing Borges’ passage: ‘animals are divided into: a) belonging to the Emperor, b) embalmed, c) tame, d) sucking pigs, e) sirens, f) fabulous, g) stray dogs, h) included in the present classification, i) frenzied, j) innumerable, k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, l) et cetera, m) having just broken the water pitcher, n) that from a long way off look like flies’ (1970: xv). For Foucault, bringing together different elements, that seem, in the first instance, to have no significant relation to each other, demonstrate the possibilities of other systems of thought and the ‘stark impossibility of thinking that’. Borges writing on the encyclopedia, produced a laughter for Foucault, that shattered the logic of his thought. For Foucault, heterotopias are disturbing because they ‘secretly undermine language’. They shatter the common names of things, they destroy the ‘syntax’ of ordering knowledge, and confront the possibility of grammar at its source.
foreignness and how these conversations and discussions involve, as Foucault would argue, the possibility of ‘thinking otherwise’. It is the distance and proximity of relations between ‘things’ that challenges the order and representation of certain kinds of knowledge on and about foreigners.

What the net of relationships invites is a form which highlights my own readings and analysis. But this does not limit the multivocal readings and possibilities the conversations can offer. What I do want to suggest is the practice of writing — how what is written, discussed and spoken — enacts this theory and writing. It is the gaps and spaces in-between a net that invite other readers and writers to enter into the issues addressed. It is here that time interjects. Understood in this context, time involves the coexistence of past and present experiences as they are read and written into a kind of future anterior. As Elspeth Probyn notes in our conversation, the future anterior is about an ‘imagining of the future that has already been refolded in the present’ (see Part Two, ch. 2). Thus it is the co-presence of different layers and textures of foreignness that relay a kind of future memory — where the past and present are activated by the imaginary spaces of the reader and the writer.

Interestingly, it is the gaps and spaces in-between a net that allow the text to breathe — the fluid movement of intersecting ideas that evoke the life of this text and how it can be read. Indeed, without breath there can be no life and no movement. To inhabit another’s breath in a text is to respond to the rhythm and pulsation of different bodies and thoughts which collude and collide. I felt this breath and rhythm materially when I was working on the radio translations of the dialogues, the cutting and assembling together of ‘our’ voices would often involve inhabiting each other’s breath. Significantly, this process involved the spatial layout of, and layered relations between, the different voices and sounds of the radio text. Often, in the editing process, when I was cutting between voices there were moments when it was unclear whose breath was being heard. There was a doubling of gasps, of breaths, as we entered each other words and cut across and between each other. Inhabiting another’s breath produced the material trace of the other within speech itself — that is, the authenticity of another’s words were inhabited by the ghostly trace of another’s presence.

One of the functions of the metaphoric net is to explore the conjunction of voice and writing — in its various constellations and forms. It is the space of inhabiting another’s breath, words and rhythm that activates the poetic function and making of a text.⁴ In this sense, the conjunction of

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⁴ See Hélène Cixous ‘Breaths’ (1994) for a fictional portrayal of voice, breath and the birth of a ‘feminine’ writing subject.
rhythm and breath is an experience of the whole body. Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests in our conversation it is ‘both the mind and the body’ that rhythm takes hold of, and ‘invites the reader’s or viewer’s collaboration with the writer or film-maker in bringing about the full resonance of the work’ (see Part Two, ch. 4). For Umberto Eco (1979), the notion of a poetics of the open work is where rhythm, breath and the musical elements of words enable a writer and reader to activate a text. Exploring the work of Henri Pousseur, Eco cites how the relationship between the production of a work and its reception can be understood through the notion of a ‘network of relationships’. Pousseur writes how the reader activates a text like a musical score:

Since the phenomena are no longer tied to one another by a term-to-term determination, it is up to the listener to place himself deliberately in the midst of an inexhaustible network of relationships and to choose for himself, so to speak, his own modes of approach, his reference points and his scale, and to endeavour to use as many dimensions as he possibly can at the same time and thus dynamize, multiply and extend to the utmost degree his perceptual faculties (cited in Eco, 1979: 55 emphasis mine).5

The net of relationships, then, is about the texture and language of listening, a process that occurs through conversation, but also in the activatisation of reading and writing. This notion of hearing and listening, and the movement between speech, writing and reading is explored in varying degrees throughout this next discussion and in the following chapter. To be able to hear and listen to what is being spoken activates a dialogic imagination. And, as this thesis is dialogic in character, the reader can choose which elements of the text to listen to, and activate, according to how they hear and collaborate with the various parts. Because listening to a text, to a voice, the rhythms, silences, sounds and images that are felt and experienced are the affective and corporeal spaces of being. Listening evokes the space between us — the collaborative function of writing and speaking with others.6

By posing a different understanding of ‘listening’ throughout these series of conversations,

5 See Eco’s ‘The Poetics of the Open Work’ (1979). In this essay, Eco explores the notion of poetics through Henri Pousseur and his analysis of James Joyce’s Finnegan’s Wake.
6 The role of ‘listening’ in psychoanalytic practice has a rich and involved history. Roland Barthes essay ‘Listening’ (1991a) explores listening and hearing in literary and psychoanalytic terms. In this thesis, the notion of listening is built upon the idea of a dialogic imagination. This intersects with some of the psychoanalytic understandings of listening — that is, to listen comes from the unconscious or ‘unthought’ elements in discourse. In this way, my notion of listening includes and departs from a psychoanalytic structure. For important discussions on psychoanalytic listening and ethical practice, see Julia Kristeva ‘Within the microcosm of the talking cure’ (1986) and New Maladies of the Soul (1995a). For the classic reference to psychoanalytic transference and the role of the analyst in listening to the other, see Sigmund Freud ‘Observations On Transference Love’ (1975[1915]) and see also Jacques Lacan Écrits (1977) for an elaboration of the analyst and analysand, and the listening relationship. For an interesting discussion of sensation, speech and analytic hearing see Anna Gibbs’ essay ‘Re-presentation: From Sensation to Speech’ (1998).
dialogues and discussions, hearing itself introduces the intersections of ‘space and time’ in and through writing (Barthes, 1991a); this hearing is not premised on a sovereign self, but a ‘self’ that emerges through listening to the connections with and alongside others. In a certain way, what is occluded in writing are the aural textures and fabrics of listening that come from the ‘dark grotto of the bodies that hear them’ (de Certeau, 1984: 162). The dialogic imagination that is being evoked here is based around how the oral enters the spectre of writing, and becomes a ‘stage for foreign voices’ to be heard.

What I wish to evoke are the sonority of voices and their embodied realities, the visual, tactile, olfactory and affective senses that emerge through the dialogues and in their analysis. As Michel de Certeau (1984) and Alphonso Lingis (1994a) argue, the murmurs of the world — the rumblings, vibrations, sounds and rhythms are the imperative forces that travel between interlocutors in living and scriptural economies. In this sense, it is not simply meaning that is pursued in the conversations, but what pertains to the experience and the ground through which we engage with each other. It is the space between conversations that allows for the rumbles of difference and the time of the other. As Lingis argues:

‘To question someone is not simply to make oneself a receptor for information which one will soon reissue; it is to appeal to another for what is not available to oneself. To address a query or even a greeting to another is to expose one’s own ignorance, one’s lacks, and one’s destitution[...] The time delay, between statement and response, is the time in which the other, while fully present there before one, withdraws into the fourth dimension — reaffirming his or her own otherwise[...] The one who understands is not extracting the abstract of out of the tone, the rhythm, and the cadences — the noise is internal to the utterance, the cacophony internal to the emission of the message. He or she is also listening to that internal noise — the rasping or smoldering of breath, the hyperventilating or somnolent lungs, the rumblings and internal echoes — in which the message is particularized and materialized and in which the empirical reality of something is indefinitely discernible, encountered in the path of one’s own life (1994a: 87-91).

The multi-faceted layers of listening, speaking and writing about foreignness emerge through the dialogic encounters I had — between writing, reading and the conversations themselves. Our first encounters were through my collaborators’ writing and the practices of their research — which embodied academic writing, poetry, autobiography, memoir, film and fictional writing. In relation to the interweavings and translations which permeate the body of this thesis and how this text can read — the passage or movement between different lived realities and critical practices — are retranslated, narrated and recounted here.
Acts of Storytelling:

*Portraits of writing — the weaving of other stories...*

In reading Eva Hoffman’s book, *Lost in Translation*, her account of language and subjectivity resonated a strange familiarity. Her process of writing through a radical disjuncture of self and translation articulated the complexity of life in a new language. Throughout her book, the straddling of languages and disparate historical realities mark the differences between her experience of translation, language and familial relations. At one point in the book, Hoffman narrates the layers of translation experienced between herself and her mother, the radical disjunctures in time, language and culture. Hoffman writes how her mother confronts the realities and collusion between different worlds as being stuck within and outside the time of the ‘shtetl’ (the community where she grew up in Poland) and the ‘new world’ — Canada. As I was researching Hoffman’s work and forming questions around the issues of time and cultural translation I was struck by this experience in a most intense way. In one particular passage the geographical and emotional distance between mothers and daughters resonated:

 [...]the crossing of the ocean has bollixed up the time distances between us. We’ve been catapulted across so many generational divides, backward and forward at the same time, that it’s hard to know how to count them. Sometimes I measure the distance between us by how much I travel. My mother, through all of her uprootings, has retained the habits of a small-town life. Going downtown is a considerable outing for her. She has never learned how to drive a car, and once, when she sees Alinka break into a sprint, she says regretfully, ‘I’ve never done that. I’ve never run’ [...] my mother has never swum, or skied or skated, or taken a trip entirely on her own (1989: 250).

As I read this I was seized by own memories — the generational and experiential difference of cultural displacement. I had had similar conversations. Being able to ‘travel’ in and of itself was a freedom my mother never experienced. The guilt and pain associated with being able to ‘walk’ freely, run and swim conjured up the images of the distance between mother and myself. I felt this strange familiarity with the story. Yet, Hoffman’s story was about another time, place and history. In it’s difference, we shared a space, and an experience of exile and migration. As I re-read Hoffman’s passage, forming my final questions, the pain marked itself on my body as tears — that appeared to come from nowhere — fell silently onto the page.
It was through the different stories of foreignness that I read and experienced that frame this thesis came together. Stories and encounters mostly between women writers I knew intimately through books I had read and stories I had heard. I recount Eva Hoffman’s example because it can be multiplied across each of my encounters where foreignness affected me in intense ways, but sometimes it was in the banality of everyday experiences — the daily and radical disjunctures in being, language and identity that intensified the experience. It was these encounters with others — a world of others — whose difference, distance and proximity to each other produced the on-going desire to explore how other people live, feel and breathe foreignness. In this sense, their writing and the practices of their research were the first empirical site of our encounters, and where our first meetings took place.

Through the intimacy of reading their work — inhabiting another’s words — the notion of foreignness took on multiple forms and relationships. The intimacy involved a distance — a strange and familiar distance of placing oneself into the language of another. Traces of the self dissolve as one enters another’s writing. Words ruminate, shift, alter. Leaving the silent traces of other histories, memories and stories that are reworked anew and differently. Georges Poulet (1995) in his work on criticism and the experience of interiority has noted that reading is a kind of alien encounter where thoughts of another are transposed into ‘us’. Reading is: ‘a way of giving way not only to a host of alien words, images and ideas, but also to the very alien principle which utters them and shelters them’ (1995: 105).

Importantly, though, reading in a language that is ‘not one’s own’ — reading is inflected by the tones, rhythms and sounds of other grammars. Language comes together in strange constellations and forms. It involves a kind of interpellation into the systems and codes of the ‘new’ and foreign language. In the most part, English was the language that was the passage way and medium that I read and collaborated silently with the writings of others. Yet English was often foreign to the writers themselves, if not directly, then indirectly, through being or straddling two or more cultures, languages or social positionings.

Even if there is a certain competency in a new language, the strangeness of a language or the awkwardness experienced makes one a foreigner to the language. And, yet how this is lived and expe-
rienced, as Hoffman, Kefala, Trinh and Ang explore in various ways in our conversations, depends on one’s relation to another language, how the past and present intersect with the ‘new’ language and one’s cultural positioning. Significantly, in Julia Kristeva’s Séméiotiké (1969) she discusses how the foreign is a mark or scar which makes and remakes a foreigner within language: *To make language into work*, to work in the *materiality* of what, for society, is a means of contact and of comprehension — is this not to make oneself, from the start, foreign to language?’ (cited in Barthes, 1989: 171). As Kristeva explores through her various writings and in our conversation, it is women, exiles, foreigners that mark this scar in language — they exist outside the inside of cultural authority and ‘authoring’.

The foreigner occupies the strangeness of imagining a place that is simultaneously nowhere and present within language. This foreignness is no more clearly evoked than in the passage of reading or making sense of the world, as Michel de Certeau has argued, where the self encountering language is neither here nor there, one or the other, but ‘simultaneously inside and outside, dissolving both by mixing them together’ (1984: 174). The experience of being simultaneously inside and outside makes one a passenger through language, and disrupts the notion of authorial ownership of a language.

In this sense, the inflections, rhythms and tones of imagining and reading about others is filtered through the foreignness of languages — languages that are inflected from a different place.

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8 Interestingly, in Alice Kaplan’s book *French Lessons* (1994), she writes about taking on a new identity through learning the French language. For Kaplan, learning French was a tool for her to write about French fascist thinkers and to exorcise the legacies of her Jewish past and her own relationship to foreign languages.

9 I have a French copy of *Séméiotiké*. I cite the translation of this quote from Roland Barthes’ *The Rustle of Language* (1989) as it is the most readily accessible to me. But the layers of translation and the spectre of another language are no more evident than in Kristeva’s book title. *Séméiotiké* (1969) appears in the French version in its Greek spelling. I struggled to read the Greek *Smeiotikê*, and finally made sense of the word when I spoke it aloud. I could put together the sense and meaning, and the memory of similar words in Greek as I moved between English, Greek and French.


11 Kristeva talks about sexual differences, language and cultural identity in our conversation. Significantly, there are grammatical differences that mark out ‘sexual’ differences in languages such as French and Greek, and theorists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have argued for rendering the visibility of these differences within language and subjectivity. In English, the ‘neutrality’ of the language doubly masks the phallocentric nature of discourse. For some important discussions on sexual difference and language see Luce Irigaray *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a), *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985b), and *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993). See Hélène Cixous *‘Sorties’* (1981) and *The Newby Born Woman* (1986). See also Deborah Cameron *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (1985), Anne Cranny-Francis and Terry Threadgold (eds) *Feminine, Masculine and Representation* (1990). There are many feminists reworkings of the philosophies of masculinist languages and discourses, for an important discussion of a way of rewriting linguistic and metalinguistic theories for a ‘feminist poetics’ see Terry Threadgold *Feminist Poetics* (1997), and for a discussion of feminist poetics, translation and gender see ‘Feminist Poetics’ in David Homel and Sherry Simon (eds) *Mapping Literature: The Art and Politics of Translation* (1988). Perhaps one could argue that Gertrude Stein was one of the first ‘feminist’ writers to rework grammar, language and identity.
Indeed, as Roland Barthes has noted, ‘to read is to make our body work’, and psychoanalysis has taught us that ‘this body greatly exceeds our memory and our consciousness’ (1989: 31). For the tears that marked my encounter with Eva’s words, the affect and emotion was a bodily instance of inserting myself between past, present and future experiences. From this encounter, my relationship to her writing involved a certain transformation of affects that ‘work you over’ where a bodily memory and consciousness exceeds the limits of the text. And if we consider the act of reading as a kind of ‘poaching’ as Michel de Certeau has argued:

[then the subject] poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one’s body. Ruse, metaphor, arrangement, this production is also an ‘invention’ of the memory. Words become the outlet or product of silent histories[...]. The thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. A different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place (1984: xxi).

In this transversal of roles, where the reader slips into the writer’s place, the intimacy and distance of other writings open up the spaces of the imagination.\textsuperscript{12} The merging of exterior and interior positions produced a landscape where I could move about and travel with the experiences of others. But it was through being outside the inside of their writing that the images, sensations and ideas took shape. Through their work and this writing I find myself taken over by a second self, a self which is neither ‘I’ or you, but like a middle finger that taps on this key board, punctuating my text: it’s a holding together and rhythmic pulsing between these subjectivities. The materiality of the work itself takes over and produces me, as I read and recall the instances of our first meetings.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} I shift deliberately here from ‘author’ to writer. The writer and the author occupy different places — the author is the ‘authorised’ subject of discourse, whereas the writer can be someone who has a relationship to writing and ‘texts’. See Michel Foucault’s ‘What is an Author’ (1993b) for a discussion of how the author is a situated in discourses of power and knowledge.

\textsuperscript{13} See Tony Bennett ‘Texts, Readers, Reading Formations’ (1992) for a discussion of how meaning is produced within ‘reading formations’ that regulate encounters between texts and their readers. For Bennett, reading is not ‘passive’ or consumptive — it is an interactive exchange. I draw on de Certeau (1984), Barthes (1989) and Foucault (1993b) who frame the ‘productive’ relation of the reader somewhat differently. In their different ways, these thinkers argue reading and writing is about actively engaging with the processes of meaning production and circulation, hence embedded in the history and politics of cultural enunciation.
A Poetics of Foreignness

Through the medium of writing the images and reverberations of different language practices and cultural histories come alive. For me, the meaning of foreignness takes ‘route’ via the passages others. It is the relationship between foreignness, translation and the dialogics of the text — by intimately placing oneself beside the writings of another — where words take on a new life and materiality of existence. Indeed, imagination is about intimacy and distance — the proximity needed for inventing a theory and methodological practice.

As Michel de Certeau (1984) has argued, all forms of writing, critical, theoretical, fictional, involve practice and invention. Importantly, de Certeau’s theory of practice is about process and image making, or to put it in a different way, a poiesis. In this context, poetics involves a ‘making’ that is grasped corporeally, because as Terry Threadgold has noted, critique itself is a poiesis, a making; ‘one does not simply analyse a text, but one rewrites them[...] one does not use a theory, but one performs one’s critique’ (1997: 1).14 In this understanding, poiesis always involves a translation or re-writing of the texts that one encounters. Furthermore, if we explore the notion of making theory as techne — art or craft in the Greek sense of the term, the relations between writing and critical production are about the process and the actual bodily practice of writing. As Martin Heidegger (1993c) has argued, techne belongs not only to the ‘craft’ or skill of making, but also the art of the mind or imagination: ‘Techne belongs to bringing-forth, to poiesis; it is something poetic’ (1993c: 318).15 The spaces from where we write: the desk, the chair, the tape recorder, the musings, the mistakes, the translations, the sounds, and the images work together to produce the contours of the imagination and the places from where we speak.

In this way, criticism is a making and involves, in this context, what I call a poetics of foreignness. The relationship between foreignness and the dialogics of the text can be translated

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14 See Terry Threadgold’s Feminist Poetics — Poiesis, performance, histories (1997) for a detailed discussion of poetics, critical writing and feminist thought. Importantly, she suggests the necessity of rewriting and re-reading patriarchal discourses that have often been discarded in feminist writing. She argues, then, “[t]o rethink poetics in these ways suggests a variety of other possible strategies and metaphors for making new feminist theories which will speak and write what the older poetics “does not know it says”” (1997: 1).

15 See Martin Heidegger’s ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ (1993c) for a comprehensive discussion of the philosophical relation and link between the word techne and episteme. For Heidegger, when technology is divorced from its poetic function, there is a danger of alienating the questions and truths that shape human relationships to knowledge and existence.
through this concept of poetics. It is in the act or in the 'art' of production that we can posit how language is manipulated, experienced and used in 'a network of places and relations'. In de Certeau's terms, the poetic operation brings forward the 'non-discursive', the unthought or unconscious elements of discourse. Here, the non-discursive or the unthought is invoked through the poetic 'citation' that brings together the ways in which I write and the different modes of perception that produce theories of foreignness and questions of cultural and political identities across the conversations and dialogues.16

Importantly, for Bakhtin (1981), in his notes 'towards a historical poetics' the concept of time is introduced as the fourth dimension of space. Clearly for Bakhtin, the novel and poetry serve different functions of the 'dialogic', but the notion of toward a historical poetics is informed by the possibility of rethinking the enunciation and dialogic imagination between speakers, writers and readers. For Bakhtin, the notion of 'chronotope' presents the poetical function of the text: intrinsic interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relations that are 'artistically expressed in literature'. Chronotope literally means time-space, and suggests the intersections within the different voices and languages of a historical work. For example, the 'road' is a chronotope that emerges in Bakhtin's study of the novel. Bakhtin notes all encounters in novels occur on the road between different classes, voices and experiences. In this context, it is the intersections of different travels on and 'by the roadside' that come together in the lived experience and critical practices of foreignness.17

As James Clifford has argued in Writing Culture (1986), once dialogism and the polyphony of voices are recognised through the paradigm of different temporal and spatial relations, we can then reconsider how the empirical and writing are represented and understood.18 Drawing on this understanding, I suggest the interconnections of spatial and temporal relations situate how the body enters the field of knowledge at the time of writing. But the hand that writes or the body that reads can never be fully accounted for in this time. This 'lost' time always haunts the 'origins' of a text and its translation, because what can never be recaptured is the time of writing. What I want to do is 'regain' some of this time by tracing the poetics and bodily experiences of writing and critical production in

16 See Roman Jakobson 'Linguistics and Poetics' (1972) for a discussion of the relationship between poetics and linguistics, and 'what makes a verbal message a work of art?'
17 See Antigone Kefala's conversation 'By the Roadside' in Part Two for a metaphorical journey on the road, and her travels through foreignness.
18 See James Clifford Routes (1997) for his elaboration of spatial and temporal relations through the notion of 'chronotope' as travel. See also Johannes Fabian Time and The Other (1983) for important discussions on time and the representation of the 'other' in anthropological writing.
this thesis. The importance of tracing this time and the spatial organisation of texts allows for an analysis of how ‘speech’ enters writing and how writing produces the life of a work.

The concept of dialogism, then, introduces what could be called the ‘time of writing’. Importantly, as Homi Bhabha has written, we need another time of writing, one ‘that will be able to inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic ‘modern’ experience of the Western nation’ (1994: 141). Recasting Bhabha’s problematic, the ‘time’ of writing, here, involves the dialogic relations between different modes of thinking, writing and speaking on foreignness. The question of time involves the social temporality and historical forces that produce relations between different writers and readers. That is, the question of memory and writing, history and cultural production are relations that intersect in the ways different life histories are narrated and theorised. In one way or another, all of the conversations deal with the problems of time and historicity. That is, how we speak foreignness and articulate it within the histories of colonisation, migration and cultural displacement. As de Certeau notes, ‘while place is dogmatic, the coming back of time restores an ethics’ (1986: 221).

Importantly, Bachelard (1994), de Certeau (1984) and Barthes (1989) in their different ways, introduce the concept of ‘time’ and memory that is involved in a poetic imagination. Borrowing Eugene Minkowski’s auditory metaphor of rententir, which translates as reverberation, Gaston Bachelard explores the way ‘time’ activates the resonating spaces of memory, which in turn activate the space of imagination. For Bachelard, when we read or encounter objects and spaces — images excite us — afterwards, through a reverberating sound that calls forward an image and the space of one’s imagination. Indeed what intervenes in the sameness and simultaneity of reading and writing is time: the time of difference — the difference between the ‘I’ that writes and the I that is written, the ‘you’ who reads (as Barthes has aptly described) and the infinite play between words, meanings and the intersubjective relations that are attuned in the resonating images as they form them-

19 Marcel Proust tried to ‘regain’ this lost time in his writing. For example, Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past: 1 (1989) explores the role of memory and the time of writing.
21 See Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space (1994) for a rich discussion of the intimate psychic and material spaces of ‘home’ that shape human subjectivity and imagination. For Bachelard, it is exploring the memory of ‘houses’, the surface and depth of corners, cellars, drawers and galleries, and the possible ‘roundness’ of being that gives us a sense of meaning and place in the world.
22 Bachelard draws on and reworks Henri Bergson’s important work on memory. See Henri Bergson Matter and Memory (1991) for a discussion on how the image is a kind of diagram, that is part of translative movement that challenges traditional philosophical conceptions of memory and representation.
selves on the page. That is, the different constellations and sensations of images: affective, sonorous, and rhythmic pulsations that 'work on the body'.

Importantly it is the 'technologies of dialogue' that introduce the complexity of how time, memory and writing intersect and develop the connections between speaking and writing about foreignness. The point is to move away from considering writing and dialogue as 'purely mental concepts' and towards viewing writing and dialogue as embodying 'manual' ones. Following writers such as Barthes (1987, 1989), de Certeau (1984), Eco (1979) and Benjamin (1992a), the challenge of writing is to move away from the notion of a 'sovereign' and individual subject authoring the text, to a polymorphous and critical writing that is produced in conjunction with others. As Barthes (1989) has argued, to show the 'book in process', or a work in process, is to allow ourselves into the 'speech-act'. In this way, this writing and critical analysis is about making visible the collaborative production of the text and the poetics involved in the conversations.

The stories, theories and anecdotes discussed throughout the conversations circulate and envelop each other activating the resonating space of time, memory and writing. In the silent words and images on a page, or in the spoken word as they are retranslated here the resonating images and voices that exist evoke the sounds of memory and imagination. Hearing, then, or listening, to the stories written and told by others involves, what Barthes calls, a 'writing aloud'. Being able to hear the grain of the voice that speaks is not speech, rather it is how writing can be thought through a cinematic image where, as Barthes writes,

"cinema capture[s] the sound of speech close up (this is, in fact, the generalized definition of the "grain of writing") and makes us hear in their materiality, their sensuality, the breath, the gutturals, the fleshiness of the lips, a whole presence of the human muzzle (that the voice, that writing, be as fresh, supple, lubricated, delicately granular and vibrant as an animal's muzzle), to succeed in shifting the signified a great distance and in throwing, so to speak, the anonymous body of the actor into my ear: it granulates, it crackles, it caresses, it grates, it cuts, it comes (1994: 67)."

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23 I discuss the actual translation of the conversations from speech to writing in the next chapter, and in the postscript come back to the ways in which I had to translate writing back into speech for the radio dialogues.
Subjectivity at Work — Rewriting and the poetics of experience

The conversations provide a framework for understanding the relations between the 'self' and the process of storytelling that are central to this study. When I began to assemble the conversations, the relation between memory and life writing became central themes that suggested the interwoven nature of experience and certain forms of autobiographical 'staging'. Throughout the conversations, the notion of staging involves challenging dominant assumptions about self, 'origins' and identity by reinserting how identities are produced and experienced in given social and cultural contexts. For example, Jen Ang discusses how certain notions of 'Chineseness' and 'not being able to speak Chinese' both inform and produce the way in which she negotiates and plays out her identity. What I would suggest is that narrating one's life involves certain forms of 'staging' or enacting how one lives, experiences and writes about foreignness.

The conversations, then, are not simply a collection of autobiographical reflections, but rather different 'stagings' and reflections on writing and critical practice. The art or techne of living and writing intersects with the inventive capacity of memory. For the conversations are layered connections between life and cultural practices — writing, film, poetry — and theoretical articulations and personal reflections. The oral nature of this practice of storytelling involves various movements and translations from speech to writing, and it is through this process that the inventive capacity of memory and the critical practice of writing merge. This mediates and touches keenly on the body — bodies that inhabit the localised production of foreign texts. This raises the important connection between the 'poetics' of foreignness and critical work, which as Michel de Certeau notes involves the, 'question concerning a discourse which would be the art of talking about or constructing a theory as well as theory of that art — that is, a discourse that would be the memory and the practice, or in short, the life-story of the tact itself' (1984: 76).

This relationship between memory and the practice of 'tact' is invented through conversation

24 The notion of identity and questions of self traverse the conversations in multiple ways. I will develop some of the interconnections between the notion of 'self' and the idea of the production of identities in Part One, Chapter Four.
and dialogue. The act of storytelling through anecdote (anecdote derives from anekdota — the Greek word meaning secret and unpublished stories) — provides a referential point that interlocks the theoretical and experiential practices of my research. Understood in this way, a poetics of foreignness is about traversing the field of experience and its theoretical possibilities. The importance of memory and life writing as relayed through stories, anecdotes and experiences are central to the conversations. It is the critical relations between anecdote, storytelling and theorisations of self: the movement between being and belonging that are crucial elements in how the narrating of one’s life touches on certain elements in the aesthetics and politics of writing.\(^\text{26}\)

But what is the self in the tactical play of critical theory? In this context, the self exists as the ‘metaphorical play’ in-between subjectivity and the outside of identity. That is, the self that is enunciated moves through and between outside the inside of (inter)subjective and cultural relations — which is always historically grounded and socially formed. If we consider this, then, as Sidonie Smith notes, we can begin to understand how the ‘self’ is not a prior essence, but rather a ‘cultural and linguistic fiction constituted through historical ideologies of selfhood and the processes of [...] storytelling’ (1987: 45).\(^\text{27}\)

Characterising this mode of storytelling, Meaghan Morris suggests how anecdotes are important referential points in constructing communicative diagrams that are not expressions of personal experience but ‘allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working’ (1990: 15). In this way, the anecdote can provide other ways of seeing and perceiving the world. In this context, this involves the reading and writing of different kinds of storytelling. For Morris, anecdotes need not be ‘true’ stories, but must be ‘functional in a given exchange’. As Morris notes: ‘I take anecdotes, or yarns, to be primarily referential. They are oriented futuristically towards the construction of a precise, local, and social discursive context, of which the anecdote then functions as the mise en abyme’ (1990: 15). It is this kind of ‘future memory’ that enables the continuation of stories, so that a story moves towards a futuristic reader — a reader who will write themselves into their own precise and local contexts.

\(^{26}\) See Paula Hamilton ‘Inventing the Self: Oral History as Autobiography’ (1991) for interesting reflections on her process of dialogue, autobiography and inventions of the self in the aesthetics of historical work.

\(^{27}\) Historically, the philosophical notion of ‘self’ has shifted and changed. See Michel Foucault The History of Sexuality, vol. 1 (1978), The Use of Pleasure, vol. 2 (1990a) and The Care of the Self, vol. 3 (1990b) for his philosophical discussion of the various shifts that have occurred around the ideas of self and the notions of sexuality. See Julia Kristeva ‘Word, Dialogue, and Novel’ (1982b) for her analysis of the different notions of self emergent in the ‘historical novel’. See also Diana Fuss Essentially Speaking (1989) for an important feminist discussion of, and challenge to, essentialist accounts of identity and notions of selfhood.
Here I want to argue the importance of how subjectivity works in the narrating of this writing and research. The rhetoricity of the subjectivity at work in a text, as Sherry Simon (1996) argues, involves the partial location and historical processes that form the self through writing. For Simon, this notion of subjectivity at work is not about the 'whole' of the subject reflected in a text, but rather the mediations between different cultural and historical forces that shape writing and constructions of identity. What I suggest is that the narrating of one's life through writing or through voice and oral encounters, also involves this form of rhetoricity, and the notion of 'translation' as a mode of re-writing.

For Simon, the conjunction of feminist writing and translation brings together the 'framing [of] all writing as a rewriting, all writing as involving a rhetoricity in which subjectivity is at work' (1996: 28). In this way, critical writing and the construction of identity come together to produce both the writer and cultural worker. Because in this conjunction neither position produces an essential categorisation of the other. Rather the spaces between can provide the different layers of meaning and affective desire that produces writing and critical practice. But, as Simon argues, and what the conversations here attest to, is that the space between can be a 'difficult place for the writer to occupy' (1996: 162). Yet, it is this space that embodies the multiple layers and translations that occur between life, texts and writing.

But how does narrating one's life touch on the aesthetics and politics of writing? The conversations explore elements of these through the different approaches and experiences of foreignness, and I will develop this in the following chapters. For the moment, it is important to consider how the narrating of one's life is produced by the act of writing or speaking itself. As Paul de Man has argued it is not so much autobiography or one's life that produces the text, but the 'autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life' (1984: 69). For de Man, the mode of narrating one's life, or the rhetoricity of subjectivity within a text, occurs across all texts to a certain extent. In this respect, the links between fiction and autobiographical writing are interconnected because each conveys how writing is produced rather than taken as a 'given truth' or statement of reality. In this sense, the self that emerges is based on a certain inventiveness or 'openness to the text' (Papastergiadis, 1998: 188). That is, in the interpretation or reading of a work there is a certain capac-

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28 I discuss the relationship between being a writer and 'cultural producer' in Part One, Chapter Three.
29 See Philippe Lejeune On Autobiography (1989) and Michel Beaujour Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait (1991), for their critical engagements with autobiographical writing and the notion of 'portraits' of the self within the production of a text.
ity to reach beyond an 'authentic' and fixed notion of truth, self and identity.\(^{30}\)

For de Man, the prosopopeia or the face of representation is how autobiography and the narration of one's life is generally structured and written about. That is, it is the body of the author that structures the authority and nature of the work. However, if this trope of writing is 'defaced' then the possibility of a different kind of representation of narration and self is rendered possible. In my reading of Paul de Man, the trope of prosopopeia was translated through its Greek meaning. I experienced the English translation of the word as foreign, but as I voiced the word in its Greek enunciation, it resonated the memory of the word and called forth other images of face. In Greek, prosopos refers to the face, but for me, it also resonates the image of the body. When I voice prosopos in Greek I think of the face, but I also hear the materiality of the body. In this regard, de Man's notion of defacement occurred within the contours of my own writing and embodiment of the word. This allowed me to 'deface' his argument through another language and to suggest another way of conceiving how the autobiographical produces life.

Somewhat differently, then, I suggest that for the foreigner there is already an uncanny and often uneasy doubleness or dividedness in 'speaking' the self through memory and writing. There is always a strangeness to the site of narrating one's life and the production of the autobiographical, because the production of the autobiographical is determined through the ways the histories of displacement and cultural belonging structure relations to writing and cultural reality. In this respect, Nikos Papastergiadis (1998) has argued for a politics of 'allography'. Allography produces, as Papastergiadis argues, the politics and aesthetics of cultural and sexual difference by asserting the borders and jagged relations that foreigners have to questions of representation and writing. He writes that:

Autobiography is not just about remembering a place you have left behind but could also be about what emerges from the "nostalgia" for the place called the future [...] the continuous homecomings and incessant beginnings within the present [...] Allography embraces these qualifications on the historical and aesthetic functions of the autobiographical text and is the torch which illuminates the impact of cultural difference in the construction of identity within dominant discourse (1998: 188).

In this context, allography becomes the site of experience that enacts the memory and writ-

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\(^{30}\) See Janet Gunn *Autobiography — Toward a Poetics of Experience* (1982), for a different discussion on the notion of poetics and autobiography. For Gunn, the selves that read and write autobiography are produced in relation to each other, and it's from here that meaning and self in autobiography become possible. Gunn argues: 'rather than starting from the private act of self writing, I begin from the cultural act of self reading' (1982: 8).
ing through the stories, mediations and travels of others. What I suggest, then, is that memory and
the practice of writing discussed here embrace the 'empirical' questions as well as the literary and
philosophical issues at stake. That is, the ways in which this thesis both engages with the theoretical
paradigm of foreignness through the connections between the writers' stories and dialogues on for-
eignness, and the dialogic aspects of the text itself. This is dependent upon, as I argued earlier, a
notion of 'listening'. Roland Barthes (1991a) makes the important distinction between 'hearing' as a
physiological act and 'listening' which invites the deciphering of codes between individuals. Being
able to hear, then, is a possible function for all human beings, but to listen requires a certain 'keen-
ness' and alertness.31

In a different context, Derrida (1988a) notes that Nietzsche had small but keen 'ears', and that
his keenness to hearing a text was to disrupt the representations of life, narration and the 'truth' of
writing. The reference to Nietzsche's ears suggests a notion of hearing that always involves the other
and that perceives differences. Because, as Derrida (1988a) argues, the signature of a writer can only
be embodied by the listener or reader of a work.32 It is the 'ears of the other' that make writing come
alive, as Derrida argues, 'the ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the autos of my autobi-
ography' (1988a: 51). In a similar vein, as Hélène Cixous notes, 'one writes with one's ears' (1997:
64).33 The ear physically denotes the external and internal configurations of sound and the body. For
Derrida, it is the 'ear' as the uncanny border that challenges empirical categories and relations
between writing, life and text.34 For Derrida, the relations between life, text and writing are different
border translations of each other. He argues for a notion of 'otobiography' rather than autobiogra-
phy. Derrida inserts the notion of 'oto', the unheard, as a way to situate the differences between lis-
tening, hearing and writing. As in his concept of différence, it is the unheard that forms the silent
traces and images that disturb the authority of a text, and its autobiographical function.35 What
Derrida, Nietzsche and Barthes in their different ways suggest, is how narrating one's life is produced

31 For an important reworking of 'hearing' and images, see Oliver Sack's Seeing Voices (1991). Sacks discusses how for deaf
people, it is seeing images that activate the imagination — but it could also be argued that this seeing requires a re-
sonating function of memory and hence his title, 'seeing voices', conjures up the image of voice differently.
32 See Derrida's 'Signature Event Context' (1982b) for a further elaboration of the notion of signature, and the role of
writing.
33 I return to this notion of ears in the radio dialogue with Trinh T. Minh-ha where we discuss the notion of a 'multi-
plicity of ears'.
34 In a different way, Roland Barthes' Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (1977) posits and disrupts the borders of the text,
the figure of the author and autobiographical writing.
35 See Derrida Writing and Difference (1978a) and 'Differance' (1982c) for a comprehensive discussion of difference, dif-
ference and the concept of being.
by and through the listening and inventions of others.\textsuperscript{36}

In the post-colonial context, what we must consider is how the 'keeness' of the ear attunes to the rhythms and vibrations of others — of learning to speak and write, hear and listen, to the differences that frame subjectivity. As Spivak (1988) has argued in relation to whether the subaltern can speak, 'speaking and hearing complete the speech-act'. In these dialogues, sometimes it is the borders between the self and other, the self and text that are fused; and at other times, it is the disparate and painful connections with others that frame this writing and speaking on foreignness.\textsuperscript{37} In the next chapter, I discuss the different 'auditory spaces' that the conversations have undergone, as a way to narrativise and recount the different transitions and translations between speech, writing and identity in this poetics of foreignness.

\textsuperscript{36} See Derrida's 'Living On: Border Lines' (1979) for an example of how borderlines between the autobiographical and translation can be conceptually and physically embodied within his text.

III *Between and Forward:*
Translations, Mediations, Conversations

I just thought of something I had never thought before, both in your question and your own gestures. I think the usual category of body kinaesthetics — at least what I have read people talking about gestures and body kinaesthetics — were really talking about them as part of language, either as mimicking the message that the words were saying, amplifying it or giving it a certain grammatical place. But there are also other kinds of gestures which involve being in the space, interweaving the same space, a kind of personal presence to the other person. Just as you were speaking I imagined what it would be like for two people to get together and make no gestures. Like people who get up on the podium and during their whole speech they are holding onto the podium without a single gesture. No conversation occurs this way, but suppose a conversation did. What would you think? You would think there was some kind of refusal, there was some kind of wall that was being maintained there. When you and I gesture I don't actually insert my body into the space between your hands — but almost! This is the place of our personal meeting.

Alphonso Lingis, 'Foreign Bodies', Part Two, ch. 11

*The translator transforms while being transformed...*
*I thus find myself translating myself by quoting all others...*

Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1994: 24-25

I

Translators, Mediators, Interlocutors

In the previous chapter, I outlined the methodology of my practice and introduced the notion of translation as a kind of re-writing. In this chapter, I examine what translation specifically means in this context and how I appropriate the term and its usage. From the outset, I should say that I do not claim to be writing about translation per se, but rather I explore the 'task' of the translator as a multifaceted exercise. In this thesis, then, my role has been as interlocutor — the mediator or translator between different life experiences and cultural practices. These mediations occur throughout my own experiences of translation. Somewhere in-between Greek and English, I stumble across my (m)other tongue and my second language where I translate between my parents' experiences of migration and my own. In a sense, I feel like a translator between different cultural and generational experiences. These experiences frame and have been transformed through my role as a translator or mediator across the conversations. As Michel de Certeau argues cultural mediators or interlocutors are translators who 'decode and recode fragments of knowledge, link them[...] mediators are in fact linking agents' (de Certeau, 1997a: 117-118). In a similar way, my task here has been to weave togeth-
er, as Homi Bhabha (1990) argues, the 'unstable element of linkage' that reveals the 'between' and
interstitial cultural translations between different texts, contexts and histories.

As feminist, philosophical and post-colonial theorists of translation have pointed out, the
notion of an 'original' event or context is already always in a process of translation.1 In this sense,
translation is an active carrier or shifter between languages and cultural systems of exchange.
Traditionally, though, translation has been seen as a transferral of 'meaning', from an original text to
another. The translator is often evoked in the Italian pun traduttore, traditore (translator, traitor). This
pun restates the assumption of priority of an 'original' text as a source and guarantee of meaning
while also implying that translation is but an imperfect imitation. Fidelity to the original text is the
primary vehicle in this understanding. But, as Barbara Johnson writes, a translator can be viewed as
'a faithful bigamist, with loyalties split between a native language and a foreign tongue' (1985: 143).2

Julia Kristeva has argued that language is, from the start, a translation: 'heterogeneous to the
one where affective loss, renunciation, or the break [in meaning] takes place' (1989: 41). Both Johnson
and Kristeva argue that language can only exist as foreignness to itself. Just as Johnson suggests: 'the
original text is always already an impossible translation that renders translation impossible' (1985:
146), I suggest that the different layers of translation that occur throughout the conversations and
in this analysis are about the 'foreignness of languages' and the ways of different approaches to writ-
ing, research and questions of identity.3 This notion of translation, as Homi Bhabha has argued,
opens the possibility of articulating the 'different, even incommensurable cultural practices and pri-
orities' (1990: 211).

The cultural politics of translation involves dismantling the assumptions of original and
'unmediated' realities. It is recognising the history of other languages — the foreignness of languages
— that provides a context for working in languages and histories that are not one's own.4 In transla-
tion there is always an untranslatable 'kernel' that cannot be reproduced in the languages and histo-
ries of others. As Bakhtin (1986) notes, there is always a paradox of translation and the relationship
between language and 'discourse' or the place of enunciation, because there can never be a fully
translated and unified relation between texts, as there are no 'languages of languages or texts of

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1 For some important post-colonial engagements with translation, see Talal Asad 'The Concept of Cultural Translation
in British Social Anthropology' (1986), Tejaswini Niranjan Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and The Post-
Colonial Context (1992). See also Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier (eds) Between Languages and Cultures — Translation
in the Late Twentieth Century (1997), Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi Post-colonial Translation — Theory and Practice
(1999).

2 Later, in this chapter, I develop this point about loyalty, fidelity and betrayal when I discuss cultural translation and the
politics of friendships.

3 See Barbara Johnson's 'Taking Fidelity Philosophically' (1985). For some important philosophical discussions of transla-
tion, see Joseph Graham (ed.) Difference in Translation (1985), Andrew Benjamin Translation and the Nature of Philosophy
(1989) and Jacques Derrida The Ear of the Other (1988a).

4 Nikos Papastergiadis has spoken about the possibilities of cultural translation and different forms of cultural represent-
ation within art and aesthetic practice. See 'Cultural Translation and its Limits' (forthcoming).
texts'. This difference does not render the process of translation a false one. Rather, in the new language or medium, 'the art' or process of translation can be recognised. In Walter Benjamin's terms, the site of a bad translation is ignoring this difference. Or to put it another way, Benjamin argues, the original is that point or echo that can be heard in the new and foreign tongue. Translation is, as Benjamin notes,

charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own[...]
like a fruit and its skin, the language of translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds. For it signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien[...] the original can only be raised anew[...] and at other points of time (1992b: 74-76 emphasis mine).6

I take Benjamin's point that in order to translate you have to hear the 'echo' beyond the original, and recite this reverberation into the life of a 'new text'. This is the radical position Benjamin offers in the translation between different possible texts and contexts. In this regard, the notion of translation I evoke is about the 'echoes' within and beyond the original — in other points in time, and between different kinds of mediums: verbal and non-verbal (written texts), extra-linguistic and non-linguistic events. What is of importance here is the mode of 'transaction' between 'different media' — between different oral/aural and written realities. Rey Chow argues that '[this] notion of translation highlights the fact that it is an activity, a transportation between two "media" [or more], two kinds of already-mediated data and that the "translation" is often what we must work with because, for one reason or another, the "original" as such is unavailable — lost, cryptic, already heavily mediated, already heavily translated' (1995: 193).7 The significance of this in post-colonial contexts is the recognition of the histories and processes that are involved in the construction, circulation and representation of 'other' critical realities and cultural mediums.

If we consider translation as a movement between what Roman Jakobson (1959) would call the 'intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic' — that is, translations that occur between one's own language, the movement into a 'new' language and between different 'sign systems (ie verbal to non-verbal) — then we can ask questions about the movement between different modes of research and

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5 Derrida makes a similar point in his essay 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985). For Derrida, there can be no metaphor of metaphor or translation of translation, rather it is the untranslatability of texts that mark the excess and signification involved in translation. Interestingly, this is Derrida's criticism of Lacan, because Lacan, he argues, tries to embody through the phallus a 'metaphor of metaphor'. For Derrida, the metaphor of metaphor is impossible, and only leads one back to the problem of metaphysics and the logoscentrism of western philosophy. See Derrida 'Le facteur de la vérité' (1987) for an elaboration of these points.

6 For different 'translations' of Walter Benjamin's notion of the task of the translator, see Paul de Man 'Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's The Task of The Translator' (1986b), Jean Laplanche 'The Wall and The Arcade' (1992), and Jacques Derrida 'Des Tours de Babel' (1985).

practice, in this instance, between oral/aural and written modes of research.8 In relation to this analysis, the conversations and the poetics they embody, I consider translation as a dialogic passage between and through different texts and contexts, where the notion of ‘origin’ and copy is repositioned and transposed. And, as the different parts of this thesis can be read as translations of each other, the process of rewriting has attested to this passage between words and the importance of a dialogic practice. In this sense, the conversations radicalise the notion of ‘raw’ material and oral citation in theoretical analysis. I will return to these issues later in this chapter.

Throughout this thesis, then, my task as the translator is the weaving together of different threads and voices in the text.9 Translation can be considered as a kind of dialogue — the weaving and rewriting of different voices, languages and cultural practices. Translation, as Haroldo de Campos argues, ‘is a dialogue, not only with the original’s voice, but with other textual voices’ (cited in Ribeiro Pires Vieira, 1999: 110; Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999: 5).10 This notion of dialogue is enacted here by working with several texts at a time — writing as the medium of our first encounters, the conversations, the transcripts, related readings, films and so on. I take translation as a multi-layered process of self embodiment, re-writing and cultural production.11 In this way, translation can be seen

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8 See Roman Jakobson ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’ (1959). For Jakobson, there are three kinds of translation: ‘intralingual or rewording which is based on the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language; Interalingual or translation proper the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; Intereventonic translation or transmutation, which is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems’ (1959: 261). In some ways, these three kinds or modes of translation are interlinked. The distinctions are often subtle and depend upon the ‘task’ of the translator.

9 Importantly, the ‘task of the translator’ and cultural politics have been explored by key writers working within ‘translation studies’. As Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (1990, 1998) have argued there has been a necessary cultural turn in translation studies that has opened up the cultural, political and ideological forces that shape translation as a rewriting practice. For Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, 1998) all translation is a kind of ‘rewriting’. While I am not focussing on translation studies as such, the rich debate that has emerged from these discussions and the notion of translation as a conceptual framework for re-writing informs many contemporary debates and critical engagements with translation. For some important discussions and different engagements with translation studies, literary theory and aesthetics for feminist and cultural politics see Susan Bassnett-McGuire Translation Studies (1980), Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (eds) Translation, History and Culture (1990) and Constructing Cultures — Essays on Literary Translation (1998), Andre Lefevere Translation, Rewriting, and Literary Fame (1992), Lawrence Venuti (ed.) Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology (1992), and Lawrence Venuti The Translator’s Invisibility (1995) and ‘Translation as cultural politics: regimes of domestication in English’ (1993), Antoine Berman The Experience of the Foreign (1992), David Homel and Sherry Simon (eds) Mapping Literature — The Art and Politics of Translation (1988) and Sherry Simon Gender in Translation (1996).


11 In a separate conversation I had with Carolyn Burke we discussed this notion of dialogue and translation. Burke is a writer and translator, known most notably for her translations of Luce Irigaray’s writing. Importantly, the ‘gendered’ aspect of translation was part of her experience of being a translator, and the notion of a ‘traitor’ to the ‘authority’ of female author was crucial to her experience. In our conversation, she discussed the kinds of dialogic modes involved in her translation:

When I was doing the last Irigaray book, An Ethics of Sexual Difference, it really was a dialogue. I would have to read four or five texts at once. I would be reading her French, the philosopher she was reading, and then I would have to read two or three translations of that philosopher. I would have to interpellate in English the bits that she had worked with in French. And that was necessary because Irigaray works in a very dialogic mode. For example, Luce Irigaray would be reading say Plato, so she would be having a dialogue with Plato. It is an imaginary dialogue and one has to take

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as a lived embodiment of language and experience, and as a set of 'textual practices' and dialogic encounters. In this regard, translation as a dialogic encounter transforms a text by the capacity to move between and across different languages, writings and cultural mediums. Moreover, translation is about the 'mediation' or the medium through which writing and dialogue can occur.

Importantly, my role as a translator has involved various different roles and transpositions of myself — as researcher, interlocutor, writer, editor and author. It was between editor and author, where I can position myself in relation to the writing of the conversations and their translations. It is 'in-between' these positions that my role as a writer or translator emerges. It has been in each stage of the production from the reading, writing, conversations, transcriptions, editing, revisions, communications, formatting and printing that the 'writer' can be born as a cultural producer. As I have suggested in the previous chapter, the rhetoricity of subjectivity at work in a text is constructed by the processes of writing and the historical forces that shape identity, and this is what frames a 'cultural worker', and, what I will now call here a 'cultural producer' and writer. If writing can be understood through the elements of producing rather than its final 'product' the sacredness of authoring is dismantled and the notion of polyphony or dialogism can be realised. Moreover, as Bakhtin (1986) and Todorov (1984) have argued, the object of human science is not the individual, but rather con-

her form seriously and find an English equivalent — so you are working in a dialogic mode and then you start as a translator thinking, well where am I in this? What is my position? How do I get into this? That was part of the problem because her system is sort of sealed in some respects, even though it values dialogue. But in the end I felt less as if I were in dialogue with the text, although I sometimes had questions and issues I would raise... But I had to just open myself up and become a sort of medium for the ideas to flow through; when it worked well I could do that and I could just let go off the top of my head and let it flow... This was only possible because I had a collaborator, thank God, she would check up on me and I would check up on her. And because I had someone I could trust to do that it was possible to become a mediator or let the medium pass through me.

But I am far from understanding my own set of motivations when I translate from French into English. I just know that I've done enough of it and that I was able, at least, to get Luce Irigaray into other contexts and into French feminist theory. Because, in the end, the actual translation was causing me bodily pain and distress, so that what was pleasurable has now become unpleasurable. So I have stopped it and I will only do things that give me pleasure and I know that consciously now, but it took a long time to make that choice (Burke and Zournazi, 1999).

Burke and I are currently working together and pursuing the idea of dialogue and translation in a manuscript called 'Bodies in Translation'. In our collaborations, we are exploring these issues through actual 'dialogic' writing — that is, writing together as a kind of dialogue and exploring the 'poetics of translation' and the embodied experience of writing.

12 The notion of dialogue also can be seen as a kind of hybridity. Bakhtin (1981) was the first to develop the notion of 'hybridity' within language, and that language is always already hybrid in its form. The notion of hybridity is a multi-faceted issue and emerges at various moments throughout the following conversations in this thesis. See Bakhtin The Dialogic Imagination (1981) for his important discussion of hybridity. For other important discussions and debates on hybridity, see Homi Bhabha The Location of Culture (1994), Tariq Modood and Prina Werbner (eds) Debating Cultural Hybridity (1997), and see Nikos Papastergiadis essay in the collection 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory' (1997) for a detailed discussion of hybridity in post-colonial thought.

13 See Luce Irigaray An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1993) and Michel Serres' Angels (1995) for interesting discussions on how 'angels' are the mediators and translators of hope, inspiration and creativity.
ceiving how the individual is a producer of texts.

From this vantage point, writing or researching involves a combination of forces that are an intricate and subtle interweaving or an intertextuality of different layers and processes of production (cf. Kristeva, 1984). For example, the technological aspects of writing and producing a series of conversations or the translation of these conversations for radio, involved the technologies of speech communication and a radio studio. Without these technologies the process of 'production' could not exist. I remember being taken through the whole printing process of the conversations for publication — learning how the written texts were typeset, photographed, made into film and then produced into book form. It was in walking through the stages of production that made me critically aware of the different collaborators and 'interlocutors' who were involved in the process. Every one — from the writer to the printer — was as important as each other in the chain or relay of events. From this perspective, the 'sacredness' of the author can no longer be valorised and seen as the unmediated producer of texts. As Michel de Certeau (1997a) has argued, interlocutors exist across many areas and social functions — they are often the anonymous and invisible people that transform the life of a work into another form.

It is in all stages of production that the 'aura' of being an author or researcher has been dispelled, and has been transposed through the act of writing or producing a work. And, following Walter Benjamin, this kind of materiality of production and 'labour' invites a 'politicisation of the aesthetic' in production. Moreover, it has been through the time of producing the various translations of this thesis that situates the 'labour' involved in production. It took numerous years to compile, research, write and record the conversations and to 'write up' this thesis. Similarly, the radio conversations took six months to write, edit and produce. It is this time, understood as a series of different interlocutions and stages of production, that can provide another kind ordering and spatialisation of knowledge. As I argued in Chapter Two, it is trying to regain and make claims to this time, that is necessary in acknowledging how one writes, reads and produces texts. Because the process of labour itself, the manual and embodied experiences of writing are how we engage, live and breathe 'texts'. That is, writing is a skill or tool that is produced through technologies and in collaboration with others, within a history of cultural enunciation.

The conversations, then, are a relay or series of different encounters of production. In a way, we are all translators, mediators and interlocutors between different thoughts, experiences and cultural practices. The conversations speak between and across different kinds of theoretical, aesthetic and critical approaches to foreignness. And, in most instances, reflect on the 'practices' that produce or have informed their lives and writing. They are populated by the theories and stories of others.

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that have their 'routes' in the diasporic condition of knowledge production itself. That is, the conversations draw on the creative and intellectual processes that have shaped and informed each of the writer’s own encounters with others. This is where a notion of the dialogic imagination and dialogue itself intersect in the recognition of polyphony of voices. As Bakhtin has argued: ‘No utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the product of the interaction of interlocutors, and, broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred’ (Bakhtin cited in Todorov, 1984: 30).

Throughout the conversations, the mediations and translations of foreignness shed light on the possibilities of a critical imagination and a contemporary cultural politics. Significantly, as Deleuze (1992) argues, mediators are essential to the creative construction of all ‘living’ and political works. He suggests all writers are mediators that produce real bodies. In this sense, Deleuze argues that truth is a ‘production of existence’, rather than something that exists solely in the head. In his own collaborations with Félix Guattari, it is the ‘power of the false’ rather than ‘truth’, that allows them to collaborate and produce their writing. For Deleuze, all writers, all creators are ‘shadows’ and these shadows of existence trace the path of bodies, ‘impossibilities’ and a different ordering of time and the concept of knowledge.

To further extend this point, as Deleuze and Parnet (1987) argue, mediators produce the ‘collective assemblages of enunciation’. The mediations between myself and my collaborators enact different thoughts and writings on foreignness, and as Deleuze and Parnet would put it: ‘[in] their relays, their echoes, their working interactions[...] There are only intermezzos, intermezzi, as sources of creation. This is what a conversation is[...]’ (1987: 28 emphasis mine). Moreover, the conversation belongs, Avital Ronnell notes, to the ethical relation in the effort to think the ‘infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger’ (1993: xii). The conversation conditions a commonality between speakers, and yet the ‘we’ is about the otherness that forms the basis of the interlocution, and the possibility of speaking. That is, what is worked ‘between’ us in the conversation becomes the site of meaning and interlocation. This in-between space is about the possibilities of an aesthetic and critical imagination.

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16 Jen Ang’s conversation looks at the distinction between roots and routes. For an interesting account of ‘routes’ and notions of knowledge production see James Clifford Routes — Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997).
Between Speech and Writing

As a series of interlocutions, then, the conversations lie somewhere between narrative and the interview, and involve the art of translation and the foreignness of languages — the multivocal language and practice of the conversations themselves. This is about a mode of translation across different cultural mediums and lived realities. For instance, the great bulk of these conversations were undertaken in international cities and in various parts of Australia. We talked through various networks of communication that included interpreters, translations, face to face encounters, phones, emails, letters and faxes. Some of the conversations were not face to face encounters, but were conducted only through writing and the sound of the other’s ‘voice’. For example, Renata Salecl and I met on the telephone — where we talked across different hemispheres and time zones; Trinh T. Minh-ha and I conducted the final stages of our conversation via a phone hook-up in Sydney and California. These different modes of communication capture the languages of a conversation and the forms of writing that have produced them.

Throughout the different contacts and communications, we changed the shape and body of the conversations. Some changed more than others — depending on the touch, feel and nature of the transcriptions. It is here that the staging and translations of the live event make their way into the research process and the different modalities involved in speech, writing and the written (transcription). As a relay of events and encounters, the conversations enact the movement between speech and writing. In this way, the conversations convey the transportation and translation of language along different routes. The relations between transcription, translations and conversations are the material constellations of different forms of writing. Throughout the next part of this chapter, I discuss and give examples of these translations, and the movement from speech to writing.

Transcriptions — speech as a form of writing

The role of the recording device and the process of transcription is important in the conducting of research conversations and their analysis. What is often overlooked is how these ‘technologies’ of communication structure and disseminate the material presented. Transcription and the recording device are themselves modes or documentations that involve a translation of different styles of communication.¹⁷ The tape recorder produces a kind of writing with the sounds, voices and

¹⁷ In ‘discourse’ analysis the role of transcription and interpretation has been studied. For example, Elliot Mishler (1991) examines how the spoken word is recorded as spoken text. Here I am interested in the passage from spoken to written language where the transformation is a view of transcription as already a kind of writing device. For associated readings on spoken language as ‘spoken’ text and discourse analysis, see Elliot Mishler Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative
stories it documents.\(^\text{18}\) Another way of conceiving of this transcription and dialogic process would be, as Hélène Cixous describes, '[to] x-ray-photo-eco-graph a time, an encounter between two people[...] and if one could preserve the radiation of the encounter in a transparent sphere, and then listen to what is produced in addition to the exchange identifiable in the dialogue — this is what writing tries to do: to keep the record of these invisible events' (1997: 48).

Just as dialogue conveys the lived relation between bodies, writing can only pass through the silence and strange familiarity of the lived encounter. Speech and writing are haunted by the traces of each other. In the conversations, the bodily gestures, postures and the interruptions that surrounded the context of a recording punctuated the style, flow and direction of the language and the ideas discussed. There were interruptions such as the phonic sound of telephonic beeps in the international phone links, the everyday experience of having to feed a hungry cat (with Antigone Kefala) or having to move from one room to another location because of the noise of a vacuum cleaner in a hotel lobby (with Alphonso Lingis). These factors produced the rhythm and flow, the direction and pace that shadow all of the conversations.

In the context of recording, the tape recorder caught the sounds and rhythms of the speakers. But in playing back the recordings the sounds and rhythms of spoken language were already mediated. In this context, the recorded transcriptions embodied a kind of 'double writing', because in the initial transcription work, I had a trained 'transcriber' to copy the spoken texts. Once I received the 'written transcriptions' I had to reinsert myself, to hear and playback the conversations, and fill in the 'gaps' that were left unfilled or missed by my mediator/transcriber (words, sounds and images that were 'foreign' to her ear). When playing back the voices and reading the transcripts, I would remember the meeting place — words would trigger the memory of events. But the words were often masked by a muffle, a cough, the unclear recording of voice in its reproduction. The intonations, the stutters, the repetitions of words provided the body of the conversation and its location in a place and time. In this sense, the fluidity of speech is haunted by the technologies of recording and the process of writing. Thus, partial truths are always already spoken in conversations, because the exchanges and the dynamics between bodies and encounters, will always leave the 'original' context

\(^{18}\) Interestingly, Luisa Passerini (1990) has commented on the difference between 'oral' and literate peoples' attitudes toward the tape recorder, the role of transcription and writing. In her work with the oral narratives of older Italian women and working class experiences of Fascism, the relation to the tape recorder was a passage of recognition, a narration of their place in history. Passerini notes that there was some awkwardness around recording their memories on tape, but the oral nature of storytelling was a comfortable means of their communication and reflections on the past. In her work with younger Italian women, who were more steeped in written culture and had been educated, there was a tendency to be uncomfortable with the 'transcriptions' of the oral conversation. For Passerini, these differences to the recording device and the transmission of life stories reflects the women's relations to place, memory and identity. The older generation, as she writes, has a sense of 'identity without development' and the younger women have 'development without identity'. See Passerini 'Attitudes of Oral Narrators to their Memories: Generations, Genders, Cultures' (1990).
and return in another guise or form.

In this way, the 'aura' and authenticity of speech always leaves a trace, and as Derrida (1978a, 1982c) has argued, the relation between speech and writing is its 'différence'. As I have already suggested in Chapter Two, différence evokes the kind of hearing that is involved in reading and which disturbs the authority of a text. For Derrida, the difference between speaking and writing is the silent trace and spacing of the other. As Derrida argues différence refers to differing, 'both as a spacing/temporalising'. Taking this form, speech, it can be argued, is already a kind of writing. It is perhaps what exists 'between' speech and writing that actually marks the styles and modes of being that are embodied in dialogic encounters.

As Barthes has argued, dialogues exist between two image repertoires, that of the 'body and that of thought'. What intervenes and makes possible the recoding of dialogues is writing — writing of 'the kind which produces texts'. As Barthes notes, 'writing is not speech[...] but neither is writing the written, transcription; to write is not to transcribe. In writing, what is too present in speech (in a hysterical fashion) and too absent from transcription (in a castratory fashion), namely the body, returns, but along which is indirect, measured, musical' (1991b: 7). And, as I discussed in the previous chapter, it is 'writing aloud' the voices that are heard in the grain of a voice that form the images — the collusions and collisions within a written text. It is in the space between speech and writing, that the body, voice and rhythm of another's words take on their life and movement. Perhaps, in a different way, it is Heidegger's (1993d) notion of the 'calling' forth of the other in language and in being, that marks the relation of the foreignness and différences within a text, the modalities of speaking and hearing the place of the other.19

But how do we conceive these different rhythms, textures and tenors of the body and of thought? In speech, time is played in the living context — it is ephemeral and fleeting — what is said cannot be 'unsaid'. As Barthes argues speech is dangerous because of this, whereas scription has plenty of time to 'turn the tongue seven times in the mouth' (1991b: 4). Writing has the time of memory that is rendered 'after the fact': the movement backwards and forwards is possible within a text, so that what is not understood can be revisited at another time and another place by the reader. Susan Stewart (1993) argues, what cannot be recorded is precisely the 'time' involved in writing and reading. Reading, for example, inhabits a sense of time. But it leaves no trace; 'its product is invisible' (and hence, it belongs to 'no-one', it has the full capacity here of a community and communal imagination — which is not about ownership. As I have already alluded to, conversational language belongs to a 'time' that is ephemeral and fleeting. It is heard between speakers, but the language itself belongs to a communal field).20 It is the hand that writes, or the eye that scans that cannot be record-

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19 See Martin Heidegger 'The Way to Language' (1993d) for an important discussion on the calling forth of language and the relation to speech. As Heidegger notes: 'We not only speak language, we speak from out of it' (1993d: 411).

20 See Bakhtin/Volosinov Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (1973) for a further elaboration of this notion of communal language and the role of Marxist analysis.
ed in reading or writing, but it is this ‘time’ which I wish to make visible here. Because without the recognition of the ‘gaps’ that produce the different time of speech and writing, a mode of nostalgia creeps in for the authenticity of speech and the transparency of writing. In this thesis, I am interested in the ‘rhetoric’ of spoken and written language, and the philosophical distinctions that render speech as authentic and transparent. And, it is by dissecting or rethinking the role of nostalgia in certain kinds of writing and production on and about foreigners that are central to the way memory, time and writing are discussed throughout this analysis, and how these themes are reflected within the conversations.

It is important to note that unlike writing, speech is not organised around sentences and paragraphs; it is ephemeral and exists as vibrations and sounds in the air. Its structure is less dense and ordered spatially—it exists more as a rhythm of sounds patterned between speakers. There is a kind of ‘formlessness’ to speech, and yet what is communicated through the body—the gestures, intonations, conjunctions (um, ahs, mms)—link the context and meaning. In this way, we can consider how speech is always tactical because it manoeuvres through the field and space of the other. Thus speech is inoculated by the gestures of the body and the context of its placement. The bodily gestures and tone inflect the oral hooks of ‘are you listening to me’, ‘you know what I mean’ and ‘do you understand?’ (as Barthes (1991b) notes, these are often meaningless interpellations, but are necessary in the dramatic staging of a conversation). Whereas in writing the formlessness of speech and bodily cues would be grammatically and logically difficult to understand and follow. What cannot be captured in writing is the physical gestures, the laughs, tones and modulations of voices. Consequently, the nature of a spoken encounter becomes modified according to a ‘hierarchy’ of language. It is here that the body must enter another passage or pathway for the reader.

In the following passages, I give some examples and citations of the translations and the ‘poetics’ involved in the movement from speech to writing that have produced the conversations. I use the word citation deliberately. Because what is not recognised in the ‘citing’ of authors or the citing of speech within texts is precisely the ‘staging’—the incorporating and reciting of another’s words. Michel de Certeau (1984) notes it is when ‘citations’ are viewed as truths not fictions that reality becomes ‘the simulacrum produced by a power’ and this is what makes us believe. If we consider the ‘theoretical fictions’ that structure writing, then we can no longer consider unmediated and uncontested realities. In a similar fashion, Derrida argues that writing is a practice that is always already ‘citation’ and hence a translation. He states that every sign ‘linguistic or non-linguistic, spo-

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21 See Jacques Derrida Speech and Phenomena (1973), Of Grammatology (1976), Writing and Difference (1978a) and Limited Inc (1988b) for detailed philosophical discussions and critical analyses of speech, writing and authenticity, and for important linguistic discussions on the relationships between speech and writing, see Michael Halliday Spoken and Written Language (1985). Importantly, Michael Halliday and Michel de Certeau have argued that speech and writing serve different purposes, and their different modalities are important in the analysis of research and cultural practices. For a further discussion of these points, see Michel de Certeau The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings (1997a).
ken or written, can be cited, put in quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion' (1982b: 320). What I hope will resonate and become clear throughout this thesis is that how we produce, cite and rewrite informs the practices and poetics of cultural production and critical work. And how the different writers' own works and citations engage with a certain disbelief in 'dominant' fictions and ideologies that narrate and position the lives of strangers.

Citations — Some examples of the movement from speech to writing:
Renata Salecl 'Spoils of Freedom'

Even before I begin, I should relay an anecdote to foreground my discussion in the postscript and to problematise the movement from speech to writing. Because, as I have alluded to, and will develop later, there are also translations from writing to speech that introduce a new realm of difference and image making in 'oral/aural' spaces. For example, the pronunciation of Renata Salecl's name became an urgent issue in the radio dialogues and broadcast. I had always called Renata by her first name, and in the written translation of the conversation it was never necessary to 'voice' her last name. I had always read or 'Anglocised' Renata's last name and pronounced it as Sa-le-cal. But, in the verbal translation of Slovene names, it is Sul-ez-sel. It is here that the voice can distort and mutilate another's 'proper name'. In this sense, we have to also be attuned to how writing enters speech and aural language. That is, the image repertoires that are created in the passage or movement from written words as they enter the realm of sound. But what was perhaps even more shocking to me was translating Antigone Kefala's last name, which I always pronounced as Kef-al-a (which, in this intonation, means head in Greek, and is often used as a derogative 'swear word') but which is actually Ke-fa-lah.23

To return to Renata's voice: its rhythm, timber and tonality is marked by her accent as she moved from Slovene into English for our conversation. The strong sense of her presence is pulsated by the curve of her words in English. Here I can only describe the 'grain of her voice'. But, in the postscript and radio dialogues, you can hear the relations between the written grain and the spoken voice — where all the 'texts' come alive, so to speak, through a different 'auditory' space. It is the grain of her voice that carries the accent of two languages, their different grammars and syntax. The transcription from part of Renata's first response to a question looked something like this:

Aha. Basically in Slovenia you know, ah Lacanian movements was at the time of

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22 As Derrida argues in Glas, words 'are citations, already, always' (1986: 1). See also Derrida 'Signature Event Context' (1982b) for a discussion of 'writing, telecommunication and citation'.

23 I had to remix Antigone's radio conversation. And to further add insult to injury, with 'Spectres of Place' — I introduced the Australian writer of Greek background, Christos Tsiolkas as Christos S'al-kas. Again, I had to remix the radio episode and not take my 'Greekness' as authentic, for his last name is pronounced phonetically as Chi-oil-ka'.
the communism associated very strongly with the opposition which was a non
national opposition... um, [mm]²⁴
There were two types of opposition, one was a kind of (word unclear) who were
you know writers who were very committed to the questions of Slovenian nation,
national identity and so on and the other was a group of intellectuals and we were,
Lacanians were part of that group who were non nationalists... (voice trails
off/phone beep interferes) [mmm] so our idea was basically to undermine the
socialist system but not claiming you know that the national has some special
substance that we are completely you taken by it but open up I would say the borders
and to debates some universal issues that are definitely are not nationalistic...
So we were part of that movement... Lacanians helped to understand the logic of
communist ideology much better than...

What happened in-between all of the transcriptions and the final conversations, in one way
or another, was the manipulation of language from spoken to written text. In most cases, I tried
to keep the rhythm of the speech in the written transcriptions, but the 'scoria' (darks spots so to
speak) as Barthes calls them, had to be 'cleaned up'.²⁵ Because in the process of writing, the
ephemeral nature of words and the order of things are 'embalmed'. So those verbal hooks that
keep a conversation alive were cleaned up and grammatically changed in the writing. In this
respect, in rewriting conversations we keep an 'eye' on ourselves in order to revoice the language
of speech. This occurred in the 'rewriting' of my questions and throughout each of the individual
responses. In all the conversations the transcript which had been worked over in numerous ways
was sent back to each person for further reading and collaboration. In some instances, I would also
ask them to follow-up another question or to fill in themes/words that emerged from my reading
of the transcripts. There were perhaps four or five 'rewritings' of all the conversations. The cita-
tion from Renata's conversation became this in the final production:

The political history that frames my work comes from my engagements with
Slovenian politics and psychoanalytical movements. In my earliest writings, I was
very much influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. However, there were many
questions that pertain to the problem of the subject's identification with power to
which I did not find sufficient answer in Foucault. I found Freudian and Lacanian
psychoanalysis much more useful for understanding the logic of subjectivity in
contemporary societies, especially in totalitarian regimes. In Slovenia, Lacanian
psychoanalytical movements during the time of communism were strongly asso-
ciated with the oppositional parties. At that time there were two main fronts
among the oppositional intellectuals. On the one hand, there were mostly literary
writers who were very much concerned with the issue of Slovene national iden-
tity. And on the other hand, there were intellectuals who were trying to build the
opposition movement on non-nationalist grounds. Theorists who were influenced
by Lacanian psychoanalysis were among this second group of intellectuals.
Lacanian theory helped us to understand why the communist system functioned
for so long, although no one believed in it (especially not the top bureaucrats).

²⁴ The square brackets indicate my 'verbal' hooks across the telephone line.
²⁵ See Deborah Cameron Verbal Hygiene (1995) for a discussion of the ways in which language and grammar is 'policing'
as a way of ordering knowledge and excluding different forms of grammar and ways of speaking.
Psychoanalysis also provided the framework for building up oppositional ideology which was not nationalist, but tried to incorporate the ideas of the new social movements (see Part Two, ch. 8).

Narrative and Translation

In the movement from spoken to written text, there is of course, the issue of what gets left out — the choices made in order to renarrativise an event. As Barthes (1991a), argues the immediacy of an event can only be understood through 'narrative, a mediation, a delayed construction'. That is, the 'listening' that took place in the conversations is now heard and conducted through the 'space of another navigation'. As I have argued in my discussion on transcription, there is already a mode of writing apparent, and to further flesh out this argument, how we re-hear a conversation involves a form of interpretation and narration.  

I will take a slight detour to weave together the different notions of listening and interpretative analysis that have helped to structure my thoughts on transcription and translation. I want to suggest that the mode of transcription works as a form of writing and as a form renarrativisation links to Freud and his methodology in the Interpretation of Dreams (1986[1900]). In dreams, it is the fragments as they are translated or 'narrated in one's life' that bring together the 'uncanny' or strangely familiar elements of a dreamer's discourse. It is the archaeology of 'knowledge' (to borrow a term from Foucault) that is buried and exists in the strata or layers of a text (or dream text) that involve de-coding and re-coding, and which can be translated into the life or language of a writer, dreamer or a text. Significantly, the 'buried strata' of memory, life and writing suggest the coexistence of different forces and layers of meaning that can inhabit a text.  

Importantly, the textual recoding in dream interpretation always involves 'secondary' revisions. For Freud, all primary source material in dreams is a 'theoretical fiction' because the source of anything can only be elaborated and renarrativised through secondary re-enactments (ie after the fact). Hence, this notion of interpretation displaces and refigures the 'original', and suggests that truth is always mediated and delayed (what Derrida might call the 'supplement' of a text). In the conversations, the secondary revisions are the interpretations that occurred within the conversations themselves and in their analysis.

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26 In Barthes (1991a) discussion on listening he refers to Freud's psychoanalytic work and dream analysis to suggest how narrative and mediation works in another field of hearing.


28 Recently John Lechte gave a paper on dreams and the uncanny. In his discussion, Lechte argues how dreams reflect Freud's larger project on the uncanny and the psyche. See Lechte 'Interpretation in Context: Dream and the Uncanny' (1999).

29 For an interesting discussion on how the unconscious emerges in oral history and the role of transference and speaking, see Karl Figlio 'Oral History and the Unconscious' (1988).
In the dream context, what is often remembered is primarily a visual image or visual inscription, because in a sense hearing is never directly solicited. What comes back into the interpretation of dreams is writing and speech, as the context and recontextualising of dream fragments become spoken or rewritten into the dreamer’s discourse.\textsuperscript{30} Within the dream text, as with the transcription from spoken to written text, there is the force of affect, desire and the traces of the other that circulate but cannot be grasped in literal translation — and yet these other forces structure the histories, the writings, and the places of listening. In this context, these are the ‘technologies’ of dialogue, those devices and those encounters that have produced the conversations. Significantly, as Freud has argued, in dreams there is always a kernel or the ‘navel’ of the unknown. In dreams, it is the uncanny and surprising elements that emerge that allow the dream text to be revisited and reworked. In a similar way, it was the uncanny and foreignness of the conversations as they are ‘heard’ in different contexts and retranslated — that produce the narratives, the mediations and translations between different ‘sign’ systems, experiences and senses of belonging.\textsuperscript{31}

What I suggest, then, is that it is also what gets left out of a ‘text’ that inhabits, haunts and structures its sense of meaning and context or how it will be reheard. It is the movement through writing that changes the nature of the conversation and their transcriptions, and allows them to be re-interpreted and narrated. Putting together the fragments of others’ narratives, the languages of speech involve a certain kind of layered writing that the dream text suggests. At the same time, the notion of desire and re-narrativisation has been structured by my desire (as a kind of ‘kernel’) and through collaboration. But, in certain ways, I am also a betrayer to the ‘fidelity’ of the conversations. Sometimes, I would have to re-narrate a conversation because of the sheer length (Alphonso Lingis’ conversation was seventy or more pages) or because of their redundancies — in speech, memory is kept alive by re-routing or repeating a similar idea or concept through language. It is important to say, however, that the texture, tenor and tone of the conversations, what they ‘said’ to me, actually structured the forms of re-narrativisation or rewriting I undertook. The listening that occurred then was a matter of hearing how the written text spoke to me while navigating another series of dialogic encounters. In this sense, I am both the ‘lover and betrayer’ of our conversational encounters and their translations.

\textit{Between Languages: speech, writing and the written}

Perhaps the most obvious form and ‘traditional’ notion of translation that occurred in the

\textsuperscript{30} See Jacques Derrida ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ (1978b) for a discussion of transcription and the mental processes at work in Freud’s understanding of writing, the psyche and dream work.

conversations was my dialogue with Julia Kristeva.\footnote{In Part Two, I discuss this translation process in the introduction to the conversation with Julia Kristeva, ‘Senses of Revolt’. And you can hear the different rhythms of translation and intercutting of ‘foreign voices’ in the radio dialogue: ‘Senses of Revolt’ attached in CD form to this thesis.} What is not captured, even in the transcription of the French, is the role of the interpreter who ‘orally’ translated between Kristeva and myself while I was in Paris. She was crucial to our dynamic as I do not speak French and I was thus reliant on my mediator, to allow the flow and direction of our conversation. It was through the different translations from French to English, in speech and in writing, that the movements and travels between language and how the text spoke to me continued to unfold. That is, it was each time I inhabited the different translations of our conversation, that new questions and new relationships were formed with Kristeva.

This was evident when I was preparing the ‘French and English’ transcriptions and questions for the supplementary radio dialogue with Julia Kristeva. Carolyn Burke, who was my new mediator and translator noted some differences in the French and English translations.\footnote{Some of Carolyn Burke’s most notable translations are of Luce Irigaray, see This Sex Which is Not One (1985b) and An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1993).} Burke pointed out, that in one part of the conversation Kristeva discusses her experience of identity and culture, and that this could also be translated as her experience of ‘settling’ into French language and culture. In my original translation, this part of the conversation was read as settling into French and her relation to culture. It is the important ‘conjunction’ of her foreignness within French language and her personality as a woman in culture that speaks her life as a foreigner (see the citation below). The point of Burke’s re-reading of the French transcription and the ‘original’ translation allowed me to consider and repose to Kristeva how the notion of settling into language was a bodily experience that involved her own travels through foreignness and language. What this example shows is the numerous possibilities that translations can offer — and that there is always a layer of betrayal, mis-translation, or transformation made in a ‘new language’. This does not restrict the currency of meaning, but suggests the plasticity and ‘art’ of translating that can occur across and between languages.

\textbf{French:} Et l’autre, qu’on pourrait peut-être développer, une fois installée et dans la langue française, comment j’ai essayé de développer une personnalité qui ne s’efface pas, disons, mais qui tient compte aussi bien de ma personnalité que du côté féminin et de ma culture.

\textbf{Original translation:} The other question, which we might pursue further, is how, \textit{once I was settled}, \textit{I tried to develop a personality in French} that isn’t self-effacing, shall we say, and that takes account not only of my character but of my being a woman and of my culture.

\textbf{Burke’s translation:} The other question, which we might pursue further, is how, \textit{once I was settled into the French language I tried to develop a personality} that isn’t self-effacing, shall we say, and that takes account not only of my character but of my being a woman and of my culture.

(The italics emphasise the difference in translation).

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Overall, then, what I have tried to indicate are the different modes of translation that have occurred within the conversations and in their rewriting. It is in translation, that we recognise the (im)possibilities and transpositions of different lived and critical realities. Tracing this reality, we can allow the body to re-emerge through a different posture and modulation for the reader. If we consider the different modalities of speech, writing and the written then, as Barthes argues,

this voyage of the body (of the subject) through language which our three practices (speech, the written, writing) modulate, each in its fashion: is a difficult voyage, twisted, varied [...] Dialogues have [...] as they will be read, the value of a differential experience of languages: speech, the written, and writing engage a separate subject each time, and the reader—the listener—must follow this divided subject, different depending on whether he speaks, transcribes, or formulates (Barthes, 1991b: 7).

So, in translation I try to speak to the ears of the reader, to the foreignness in the text, the gaps, ruptures and spaces that cannot be captured, but that traverse a different field of hearing and engagement. Indeed, as Trinh T. Minh-ha puts it, the creative potential of a conversation and an 'inter-view' (and she comes back to a French definition of the word) is about a kind of translation (and hence a relationship). In the conversations and dialogues I had to 'surrender' myself to the rhythm and direction of the life within the actual conversation and its 'afterlife'. As Trinh notes in our conversation, 'how one enters and engages in a conversation, [and] how an interview unfolds and is received, also depend on the kind of space opened up' (see Part Two, ch. 4).

The creative potential of a conversation is about the radicalisation of the relations between different sign systems, and in what Trinh calls the 'third' ground that passes between the two of us (not necessarily something passed between the 'interviewer' and the 'interviewee') a relationship is formed. And it is this relationship between different thoughts, ideas, languages, concepts that carry the life of a conversation beyond its initial intents or contexts — and beyond the sacredness of the live event. In this sense, the conversations are translations themselves — a 'between and forward', as Trinh argues, through different kinds of affective, conceptual and critical realities. Thus, through the inventive capacity of reading and the translation process, a conversation circulates and recreates a life of its own (the after-life of the text). It is here that translation becomes an 'art of losing without losing' which traces the multivocal layers of speaking and writing about foreignness, and opens up the 'poetics of this text' and how it can be read.

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34 See Trinh’s conversation ‘Scent, Sound and Cinema’ in Part Two of this thesis.
35 See Michel Serres Hermes (1982) for a variation of this theme of dialogue and the notion of a ‘third ground’. For Serres, we must come to understand how the ‘third man’ enters communicative and dialogic encounters. See also Alphonso Lingis’ The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common (1994a) for a critical elaboration of Serres’ notion of dialogue.
Cultural Translations — Dialogic encounters and the politics of friendships

Society of the Friends of the Text: its members would have nothing in common...
Roland Barthes, 1994: 14

A friend is another self...
Jorge Luis Borges, 1974: 51

I began this chapter by discussing the notion of translation and the mediations that have occurred throughout this thesis. What I want to argue now is how these translations and mediations involve a notion of friendship and dialogue. I will trace this argument through revisiting the notion of cultural translation and the possibility of friendship. If we consider ‘cultural translations’ as the movement of meaning across different times, memories and histories, then we are close to Homi Bhabha’s (1994) notion of ‘translation as the staging of cultural difference’. For Bhabha, it is the foreignness and the ‘untranslatability’ of texts, contexts and histories that opens up the interstitial and ‘between’ possibilities within nations, cultures and languages.

Somewhat differently, Gayatri Spivak (1993) argues for a politics of translation that locates how the staging of cultural difference involves representing the resistances, the foreignness, and incommensurability of texts. Within this representation, the histories of the interaction and cultural politics that frame a work must also be part of the translative process. For Spivak, the political and ethical are important acts in the analysis of texts, and in translation, the heart of the text can only be deciphered through engaging with translation as a mode of reading, but also as a mode of writing. In this sense, translation is a ‘dialogue’ between different ethical relations and positions to a text (Berman, 1992). But it is the notion of the erotic that is also important here — the love, loyalty and betrayal involved in translative acts, and the ethical dimension of writing across histories. As I have already argued, I am both the lover and betrayer of these conversations and dialogues. Significantly, for Spivak, the erotic and ethical play different roles in translation, but their relationship forms a bond and connection imperative to cultural translations. It is here that a relationship of intimacy and distance to another’s work and the ‘friendship’ between texts, writers and contexts becomes part of the ethical and erotic elements of translation.

36 See Sherry Simon Gender in Translation (1996) for a discussion of Spivak’s different forms of alterity: the ethical and the erotic in the politics of translation.
37 See Luce Irigaray An Ethics of Sexual Difference (1993) for her attempts to think love and the ethical.
The conversations, then, are about the kinds of friendly interlocutions and translations between myself and others. But friendship here is not premised on 'she is like me', as it becomes a transitive act. As Spivak argues, in order to earn the right of 'friendship', a relationship must be formed between the language of a text and its historical production. Friendships are about the ethical dimensions of meeting — across worlds, languages and identities — both within and between texts. This involves 'surrendering' one's own identity, as you take on and inhabit the languages of another, and what this would require, as Spivak argues, is to think in languages 'other than one's own'. It is this surrendering or giving myself over to the 'conversational texts' that allowed the possibility of friendship and ethics to be enacted through a dialogic imagination.

What I want to suggest is that friendship always involves a relationship, a meeting and a coming together. In order to translate, there has to be a friendship, a meeting, a relationship that posits a certain foreignness between ourselves and others — which are grounded in the space of difference and in the politics of enunciation. This is where the erotics is: the stagings of love and betrayal that are coupled in translation. As Trinh T. Minh-ha has argued: 'For in love, loyalty and betrayal painfully come together. One can say the same of translation[...] Fidelity to one's vocation means that somewhere along the line, at one moment or another, one is bound to break with many conformities (see Part Two, ch. 4). Fidelity, passion and freedom are played out through betrayal — in order to love one has to betray and enact the relations between different selves, bodies, texts.

Friendships are the spaces where we meet to share an encounter and exchange of ideas — an otherness shared and a relationship formed. For Deleuze and Guattari, friends are part of creativity and philosophical writing. Friendship is not about those who engage in thought: 'rather, it is thought itself that requires the thinker to be a friend so that thought is divided up within itself and can be exercised' (1994: 69). 38 In these translations, friendships are about new forms of collaboration and the notion, as I suggested in the introduction, of a 'community of those who have nothing in common'. As Maurice Blanchot (1988b) has argued, the possibility of community only exists through friendships: friendships that can be 'real' or face to face, and those that are uncanny and not based on the 'presence of the other' (ie friendships that can be found in reading and inhabiting the writing and works of another). 39 We can have friendships and dialogues with those we may never meet, but who we encounter through the silent words on a page or images in a text. For Blanchot, thinking from the outside is precisely about the multi-dimensional layers of friendship.

In the postscript and radio dialogues, I address the notion of friendship with Alphonso Lingis; where friendship is based on care — to read another's works and to be interested in dialogue is about care and the relationship between interlocutors. Friendships are not about how the other is like me

38 See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari What is Philosophy? (1994) for the philosophical import of friendship in the Platonic and Socratic dialogues.

39 For the enactment of this non-presence, the notion of imagination, writing and friendship, see Blanchot 'Foucault How I Imagine Him' (1990) and Foucault 'Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside' (1990c).
but about the differences that make us other to each other — sexual, cultural and political. This is the ethical and political realm of cross-cultural work. This notion of friendship is about the loss of the ego and self, so that the one who writes or reads is pluralised and enlivened by the voices spoken and heard. And, in the Foucaultian sense, this is the notion of a ‘care of the self’ — the aesthetics and art of the self that can be created and reinvented.

Friendship, then, as a relationship, a coming together, an otherness that provides an ethics and generosity of ideas exchanged, traverses the space of the conversations. It is not limited to the text but can be found in the spaces where we meet, mediate, translate. They are the thoughts shared and exchanged, and the creative practice that opens up the possibilities of writing and hearing differently. For Blanchot, the possibility of friendship is the ‘infinite’ distance and intimacy of encountering writing and texts, which allow new constellations and networks of communities. He argues that: ‘[friendship] implies the recognition of a common strangeness which does not allow us to speak of our friends, but only to speak to them, not to make them a theme of conversations (or articles), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even in the greatest familiarity, an infinite distance, this fundamental separation from out of which that which separates becomes relation[...] it is the interval, the pure interval which, from me to this other who is a friend, measures everything there is between us, the interruption of being which never authorizes me to have him at my disposition, nor my knowledge of him[...] far from curtailing all communication, relates us one to the other in the difference and sometimes in the silence of speech’ (Blanchot cited in Derrida, 1997: 294). And, as Derrida (1997) notes, the ‘politics of friendship’ is what disseminates and proliferates in the relationships and differences between writers, texts and communal bonds.40

IV

Translations — The cultural politics of enunciation

What I have discussed in these last two chapters is the methodology of this research practice. As a cultural translator and mediator, I argue for the importance of discussing the in-between spaces of knowledge production in order to shift away from a divorced and objective analytical framework, and to move toward an embodied, partial and mediated research practice. The necessity of this, to return to my introductory point, is that the foreigner’s voice is all too often rendered speechless by the ways in which it is positioned, theorised and understood in contemporary analytical and political practices. What I wish to dispel are these ‘truths’ about foreigners by giving them a ‘voice’. Because all ‘constructed truths’, as James Clifford (1986) has argued following Nietzsche, are made

possible only by 'powerful lies' of exclusion and rhetoric. The 'returns and turns of voices' [retours et tours de voix], as Michel de Certeau (1984) powerfully suggests, can only be made by articulating the processes through which writing speaks — the fictions of origin and the places from where writing is produced.41

In their different ways, each conversation situates the limits and moves beyond dominant portrayals and understandings of foreigners. Each of the individual collaborators deals with the 'dominant fictions' of identity and belonging on their own terms and through their own experiences. In the next chapter, I discuss the sites of experience that have framed the conversations as we move and travel through different national, cultural and linguistic borders to resituate and rewrite notions of self, identity and cultural belonging.

41 I have been reading Tejaswini Niranjana's *Sting Translation* (1992), where the definition of 'tours' in French in relation to Derrida's essay 'Des Tours de Babel' is explained. The notion of 'tours' fits here as well: tour in French refers to trope as well as trick. So it could be argued that what Michel de Certeau calls for, and what I am evoking, are the strange twists, turns and tricks in language that re-cite the foreigner.
IV Sites of Experience — Narrative Tales of Belonging

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it “the way it really was”. It means to seize hold of memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger...
The danger affects both the context of the tradition and its receivers...

Walter Benjamin, 1992a: 247

Throughout Part One, I have discussed and outlined the concept of foreignness, the methodology of this research practice and the context for the conversations. In this chapter, I examine some of the sites of experience that are explored in the conversations. In the spirit of translation, I discuss these sites through the interweaving of different cultural practices. These practices come together as pieces of a collage or montage and exist within, what I have called, a net of relationships. It is this net that weaves together a communal fabric of foreignness, and entangles the lives of different strangers. In the full imaginative potential of ‘writing aloud’, the fabric of these lives are the collages of different histories and ways of knowing. As Bottomley and Lechte (1993) describe, the notion of interweaving as a collage and its relation to translation posits the importance of ‘cultural’ practices as always in process, and these practices as interwoven within different imaginary and symbolic capacities. As Bottomley and Lechte argue, ‘practices expand symbolic and imaginary capacities’ (1993: 25). It is the plasticity of symbolic and imaginary capacities that the conversations relay through different sites of experience and cultural practice.¹

Like the pieces of a collage, pieces that cut up and pick up the transpositions and translations of different fragments and different images, I explore the intimacy and distance of foreignness. The notion of a collage/montage affect is posited within the active realm of historicity: that is the past, present and future are coterminous as layered relations to each other. Furthermore, the transposition and layering of sound, image and text in my writing and in my radio work can be understood through this montage affect. Significantly the notion of montage, as Walter Benjamin has noted, is to destroy the ‘aura’ of the original, and hence place back the plurality of ‘copies’ — in their afterlife. As I suggested in the previous chapter, it is through the translation and the afterlife of a text that a work can be revisited and circulated again and again. As Benjamin argues, the ‘reproduction’ of a work or in this case the translations of the conversations ‘meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced’ (1992c: 223).

For Benjamin, the critical uses of collage/montage are akin to his theory of translation. Collage/montage as a theoretical and cultural tactic suggests the mediations and conjunctions

between history, writing and critical realities. Importantly, Niranjana (1992) argues that Benjamin’s notion of translation and montage links to how all forms of historical writing involve the possibility of quotation and citation. She argues that, for Benjamin, the critical historiographer ‘quotes without quotation marks’ which is why the concept of montage is so appealing. That is, there is the recognition that forms of language and knowledge are always ‘citations’ and rewritings of different cultural texts and histories. As I have already posited, and Niranjana suggests, this is one way of ‘revealing the constellation a past age forms on the present without submitting to a simple historical continuum, to an order of origin and telos’ (1992: 45).²

In the following discussion, the sites of experience that I draw on are not the only ones that inhabit the writer’s works nor the body of the conversations. But these sites explore the intersections of memory and life writing, and how foreignness as a lived reality, and concept lived with, shapes the writers’ experiences and practices of writing. As I argued in the introduction, strangers, foreigners, exiles are often used as tropes to describe and define certain kinds of exclusions and ‘outsideness’ within a community. What I employ here are the layered themes or memories that re-route or ‘retour’, that is, turn back and rewrite a foreign voice through the outside in the inside of language and the dominant representations of foreigners. I trace foreignness through the embodiment of language and experience in its lived sense, that is, between ‘thought and the body of the text’. What I propose, then, is that what gets spoken through the conversations is the crossing of borders between the possibilities of a critical imagination and lived realities of foreigners.

In this sense, each of the conversations explores directly or indirectly the ‘tools’, conceptual and practical, used to think and write about foreignness. The conversations criss-cross and touch upon common themes of strangeness — it is perhaps this touch that ‘links’ them, the brushes against the grain of each other’s voice that exist within and pertain to different cultural practices and critical realities. I stretch the matrix of the net to explore these practices and realities as a means to consider and pose questions about the ontology and epistemology of foreignness. I will now investigate layered themes of translation and language, memory, self and the body, and the imagined communities and national belongings that frame my interlocutions and analysis of the conversations.

² See Tejaswini Niranjana Sitting Translation (1992) for her discussion of Walter Benjamin and the importance of montage and translation in his work.
Common Strangeness — Memories, translations, conversations

Language is an empirical site of the experience of foreignness. A sense of foreignness within language has shaped the multiple ways I experience and write about my own sense of belonging. This has been about being caught between different tongues — different grammars, and the haunting of ‘real’ and imagined places associated with language — Australia, Greece and Egypt. Language is a multiple texture of reality — sensuous, affective, spoken — felt on the body, and the pains that mark the spaces of travel and transition in a new culture. This resonates strongly within Eva Hoffman’s reflections on life in a new language, her travels between Polish, Jewish and North American cultures, and the bodily memories and affective cost of being ‘lost in translation’. Language and subjectivity are closely interconnected in her sense of self and the radical disjunctures in her subjectivity.

For Hoffman, writing is an attempt to ‘close’ the gap on being estranged from herself. The sense of foreignness, of otherness, becomes all too ‘natural’ for her. Her experience marks the contours of translation and life in a new language, but she also expresses that what often gets lost in translation is the poetry. It is the exile in a new language, and the exile from the self, where this loss becomes physicalised and deeply painful. But, for Hoffman, it is the two ‘senses’ of the word lost that resonate translation: at one level translation is about a certain kind of alienation, and at another level is about absorption, entrenchment and renewal. The ‘losses’ in translation and the texture and tenor of another language and culture can produce the distance and imagination needed to move out of purely subjective and self-absorbed understandings of the world.

The language of translation, Hoffman evokes, is also a kind of styling, where language and embodiment are also translated across cultures — through notions of femininity and gender. For Hoffman, in a very real and concrete sense, the experience of inhabiting another body, and another self was felt in the different ideas of femininity and ‘beauty’. As she describes: ‘There were literally different ideas of what was attractive. I was considered very attractive in Poland and now I was considered not very attractive at all in Canada. And I became less attractive as I started hunching and feeling timid and nervous etc...’ (see Part Two, ch. 1). It is perhaps this styling and translation of the body that pre-eminently marks the different transitional phases of foreignness. That is, the body itself speaks the processes of defamiliarisation and strangeness in a new culture. For my part, the conjunction of the body and translation is a significant one. When my brother fell into a fit of madness-induced epilepsy recently, the only thing that could speak for him in that state was his body. I came to see the relationship of translation as an embodied experience where the contortions, spasms and vulgarity of his body spoke the ‘speechlessness’ of his foreignness and schizophrenia.
Alphonso Lingis reflects on these processes of embodiment in a different way. For Lingis, it is how the body is styled and cultivated within communities that allow certain kinds of subjectivities to ‘speak’. For Lingis, those bodies that are excluded are those which ‘do not make sense to a community’. The torture victim, the madman, the ‘alien’ are those who are deemed to not make sense in the discourses of a community. The body becomes the site of castration and expulsion from a community. For Lingis, it is the ‘speeches’ of the body that make way for a different understanding of how subjectivity, language and ‘non-verbal’ realities intersect with the body of a writer and their affective life. For example, Lingis points out that we should think of Nietzsche’s body, his affective life, migraines and euphorias as ‘diagrams of many of his key concepts’. In many ways, these kinds of bodily diagrams reflect the connections between life, writing and conceptual thought. What I would argue is reflected through this analysis and the conversations is how these bodily diagrams inform the translations of foreignness, the conceptual frameworks and writings of strangers.

The experience of the foreigner, the pains, pleasures, affective costs of differing cultural realities, the scars of the psyche — if you like, are mapped through the body. In this way, the body is also the site of writing — that maps the memory and pain of foreign experience.3 Eva Hoffman’s writings and reflections on the ‘phantom’ pain of Poland inscribed on her body while walking the streets of Vancouver describes a tangible feeling of ‘homesickness’. For Elspeth Probyn, this kind of ‘phantom’ memory is felt strongly as she is caught by different smells or visions in Sydney that bring back memories of her life in Québec. These memories, she notes, are ‘stitched into the fabric of what one lives’. It is the haunting of different kinds of ‘individuated’ experiences that marks itself on the body. For Probyn, it is the surface of the skin itself — how it is ‘rubbed raw’ — that produces the memory and writings of her migration experience.

In Probyn’s conversation and in her writings, the issues of skin and embodiment are the ways in which she ‘speaks the self’.4 Her notion of the body is about thinking the various connections or ‘hyphenations’ that are made between and amongst individuals and communities. This where her work intersects with Henri Bergson’s attempts to think through the connections between images, memory and reality. Drawing on Henri Bergson (1991), memory and its representation exists through the connectedness and movement between different objects and things. If, for example, you close your eyes, and visual perception is no longer the primary source of imaging, the images that exist around and beside can be understood as multiple images in space, and experienced through one’s movement in time. In this sense, Bergson’s work may be the closest we can come to perceiving the purity of images and the concept of becoming and being in time.5 Further, it is this notion.

3 For some interesting feminist discussions on the body, writing and cultural inscription, see Elizabeth Grosz Volatile Bodies (1994), Moira Gatens Imaginary Bodies (1996), and Vicki Kirby Telling Flesh (1997).

4 See also Probyn’s edited collection (with Elizabeth Grosz) Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism (1995) for an elaboration of feminist writings on the body, desire and ‘skin’.

5 See Gilles Deleuze Bergsonism (1991) for a detailed discussion of Bergson and the nature of image, time and ‘duration’.
of image that comes close to what I have termed as a ‘writing aloud’, the cinematic images or ‘grains’ of the voice that we encounter when we hear and speak through another’s work. In a similar way, the concept of becoming-other, that Probyn traces in her own lived sense of place and in the practice of her writing — are the hyphenated connections between ontological and epistemological sites of cultural and sexual belongings.

For Probyn, the skin as a surface of imbricated forces becomes a contested site of meaning. She argues that the notion of the skin as a kind of surface marks the processes of socialisation and the forces of desire that serve to exclude ‘bodies’ from communal belonging. In her experience, her ‘whiteness’ made her a welcome foreigner to Australia in ways that were marked by the notion or imagined community of acceptable and unacceptable strangers. But perhaps the poignancy of this kind of whiteness is explored in Denise Groves’ experiences of her ‘Aboriginality’. For Groves, the interrogation of ‘whiteness’ in Australian culture is necessary to how we negotiate the space of ‘white’ and ‘black’ relations in Australia. She discusses how fixed and binary categories of white/black, urban/traditional through which to examine indigenous experience, ultimately negate the realities of Aboriginal life. There is a need to work in-between the cultural positionings of the ‘Aboriginal other’ and ‘white’ Australians in order to problematise these categorisations and limited understandings of both urban and ‘traditional’ Aboriginal identities. In this sense, Groves discusses the way her identity is constantly shifting and negotiated within the different environments and contexts she finds herself in — whether it is as a mother, daughter, teacher or friend. However, within the paradigms of Australia’s imagined projections of the other, there is a constant pressure on Groves to legitimise or ‘authenticate’ her ‘Aboriginality’. The everyday encounter with this need to authenticate her experience fits within the dominant cultural narratives on Aboriginality and the white nostalgic quest for an ‘authentic Aboriginal’ identity.

Memory, language and pain are contested zones and experienced differently according to how the ‘outside’ is felt and lived. Antigone Kefala’s travels through different languages and cultures — Romania, Greece, New Zealand and Australia are carried through the present. For Kefala, language is a medium through which to express and to be ‘true’ oneself. This truth exists with the baggage of other histories and senses of place. In this sense, Kefala’s experience of ‘Greekness’, language and senses of self are framed through various cultural, aesthetic and political landscapes. Whereas for me, ‘Greekness’ is about travelling through different imaginary relations to Greek and Egyptian cultures. Coming to writing, for Kefala, involves travels through other landscapes expressed through her memories and her current life experiences. In this way, she voices her writing as ‘Australian’ and in the context of the paradoxical modes of Australia’s relations to ‘foreigners’, this experience of Australian writing identity is never totally accepted or legitimated within the dominant aesthetics and politics of contemporary culture. So how do we begin to think a minority literature?

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6 In our radio dialogue, Antigone calls this a ‘travelling landscape’.
Kefala’s writing delves into a cultural unconscious — the kinds of fragments, narratives and aesthetic forms that are the layered experiences of the present — that reflect both a kind of universality of human experience, and the condition of being foreign. Her poetry, which is the focus of these articulations of self, writing and identity, is an attempt to portray the intensity and explosiveness of language — the different tonalities of other languages and cultural perceptions. One can argue that the foreigner’s experience is about the simultaneous absence and presence of different kinds of cultural unconscious. In Kefala’s writing, this is a tool, or poetics of the experience she wishes to convey, mediate and translate. As a writer, she discusses the significance of ‘language’ as an expression and a medium through which to explore and communicate these ideas. She notes that she wants to work with language as a ‘friend’ — and as in any friendship, care and responsibility for ‘form’ becomes integral to the practice writing. In this sense, being framed as ‘outside’ the dominant Australian cultural aesthetic, is what she wishes to address, not just in terms of ‘migration’, but in terms of an aesthetics of migration — which poses another way of conceiving the aesthetics and politics of experience.

So far I have been discussing the relationships between language and senses of self that are translated, styled and embodied. But the experience of language takes on other forms and constellations in the experience of foreignness. What does it mean to look ‘Chinese’ but not speak the language of one’s origins? For Ien Ang, the ‘experience of not speaking Chinese’ — the language of her ‘origins’ — produced a certain identity based on negativity. It is the ‘not’ that is the site of production for her, a way of writing the self and senses of belonging, by unhinging the cultural imaginary of a certain kind of ‘Chineseness’. It is perhaps not surprising that narratives produced and circulating around dominant constructions of Chineseness are constantly imposed on her from the ‘outside’. Significantly, though, the experience of Chinese diaspora means very different things in different experiences of migration and cultural displacement. For Ang, it is precisely exploring the ‘inauthentic’ relations of identity — the ambivalent and often uneasy relations to an ‘originary’ language or culture that produce certain kinds of subjectivity. What her own autobiographical writing attempts to explore are the ways in which subjectivities are produced in different cultural contexts to challenge easy claims to identity and belonging. Furthermore, it highlights that there are various elements that make up her ‘identity’, and ‘Chineseness’ is one of many cultural impositions that produce her sense of self in given social contexts. In this regard, her writing deals with issues of how post-colonial subjectivities and experiences of diaspora are both lived and translated in the social. Rather than describing a ‘narcissistic’ notion of the autobiographical, it is an attempt to explore the ways in which the world can seen to be working.

Sneja Gunew reflects on the uncanny processes and narratives of belonging that shape different kinds of mediations and constructions of identity. Her experiences of moving between real and imaginary constructions of Bulgaria, Germany, Australia and Canada haunt her psychical land-
scape and senses of self. Gunew argues that identities and the experience of cultural belonging are always mediated through language and the narratives constructed about a place. In the national sense, this is enforced by certain desires for 'authentic' subjectivity and coherent ways of explaining the foreign other. As Trinh T. Minh-ha has argued, in a different way, it is by recognising that the narratives of the nation are fictions that allow stories that are made to be 'unmade', and remade. As she suggests, 'grand narratives' of the nation have lost their potency as they continue to be challenged by 'storytelling in the margins'. Perhaps the most significant element within this is the recognition that 'notions of nation, country or community as being above all a fiction — that is, a product of language — emphasises the constructed nature of cultural authority' (see Part Two, ch. 4).

Significantly, though, Gunew suggests that the language and narrative of 'exile' also posits problems for exploring otherness within the nation. For Gunew, exile is all too often understood and narrativised in relation to its opposite, the nation or home. For Gunew, this can limit the languages we have to speak about foreignness and national belonging. But I would argue that what exile and home mean in relation to each other, can also be a site of contestation and productive reworking of how foreign experiences are framed as outside the narratives of the nation and the structure of cultural and political imaginaries. In her own thinking on diaspora, she wishes to explore how narratives exist for those, like the gypsies, who do not 'claim' a territory or land. For Gunew, moving toward understanding these kinds of diasporic relations may be a way of reworking what it means to belong, when 'home' or territory is no longer the marker of place and identity.

Importantly, for Gunew, it is the languages of class that frame her experiences and stories about place. For Gunew, coming from a 'middle class' family produced certain ways of negotiating her foreignness and gave her the confidence to resist dominant forms of education in Australia. Indeed, the experience of class is articulated in varying degrees in the conversations, although it was not foregrounded as such. But, what has come out of the conversations and in my own reflections on them, is that the languages of migration and the languages of class are often sites of conflict and of misunderstanding. In my experience, it is language itself that speaks how class and foreignness come together in familial experiences, and in critical writing. I would now want to argue that it is various different intersections of 'loss' experienced through class and language that are the sites of pain and tension in the generational experiences of migration. And, it is these sites of meaning that need to be addressed and explored in new forms of class and cultural analysis.

In a different way, it is the assimilation into dominant modes of 'Australian identity' or dominant modes of whiteness, Sneja Gunew notes, that enacts a certain 'loss' of ethnicity experienced between migrants and their children. In my instance, it was my attempt to be 'white' and the denial of my 'Greekness' that has led to certain experiences of loss, and the denial of my parents' history, experience and past. In a similar fashion, len Ang talks about this form of denial and how the self-hatred that emerges out of this makes one feel outside and other to a community. But there is anoth-
er side to this. Eva Hoffman has written about the way her sister took on a more 'fervent' Jewish identity in Canada, in response to her parents' feelings of alienation and her own experience of 'loss'. In this way, the experience of 'loss' is multi-faceted. For Gunew, there is also a certain nostalgia or sense of loss produced in the national imaginary when the foreigner is seen to only perform a certain kind of ethnicity. That is, when the dominant culture defines the parameters of 'ethnicity' and cultural identity. As she notes, the way different cultural groups 'speak' and perform ethnicity exists outside of the paradigms of how the dominant culture would speak about them. I will return later to this notion of loss and identity within the nation.

Just as the interrogation of whiteness is essential to the cultural and political narratives of nation states, it is also the question of what is 'Europeanness' that resonates in Gunew's conversation. In this respect, it is precisely: what does the question of Europe mean for a daughter of Egyptian Greek migrants? For Greece, as part of a kind of 'European' frontier, is an imaginary site for my family, and it is the hauntings, these kinds of strange twists of nostalgia for a place never occupied — and what that means in relations to senses of place and belonging that underlie the questions, and the fabric of my concerns about 'real' and imagined homes. In this sense, what does Europeanness mean? This is an issue that confronts those who have been displaced from Europe, and also confronts those forms of 'Eurocentrism' that exist in certain feminist and post-colonial writings on cultural displacement and belonging. And in that sense, Gunew discusses the strange place the different kinds of 'East' (the translatrice and border crossings of East/Asian and East as Europe) occupy in the minds of western and European feminists. For Gunew, it is how foreignness is articulated by 'European' feminists that needs to be scrutinised in cross-cultural feminist writing and cultural translation. There is a need, then, to investigate concepts of 'whiteness', but also to explore how Europeanness is understood within critical writing practices and within different national imaginaries.

Laleen Jayamanne makes a similar historical point when she reflects on writing about Australian film-maker Tracey Moffatt. Moffatt's background involves the negotiation between her own 'hybrid' identity of Aboriginal and white histories. For Jayamanne, the question became one of how to place oneself as a 'foreigner' in relation to her work and to the histories of indigenous representation in Australia. That is, what would a 'Sri Lankan' reading of her film work mean? Because there is no such thing, the question then became an 'enabling fiction', a way to begin to explore from the 'outside' the elements of Moffatt's aesthetics, political and cinematic work. What Jayamanne's 'enabling' fiction points to is how being a foreigner also involves questioning and placing 'ourselves'

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7 Turkey is technically the 'European frontier', but for my parents it is Greece that occupies this imaginary place. 8 In a conversation I had with Australian writer Christos Tsolkas (1999b) he talks about the 'multiple' Europes' that haunt his experience of being Greek Australian; and that there is a need to explore the ways Europe figures as a place, a memory and history.
outside of our own stories and cultural positionings. In order to translate and read another's work and writing requires rethinking 'our' sense of foreignness and cultural identity.

What I have tried to argue is that how one writes and translates requires a certain kind of ethical positioning and relationship, which is not premised on how the 'other is like me', but how the 'other is other to me'. What Probyn suggests as becoming other, or what Lingis would note as what 'individuates' us is precisely the notion of strangeness and difference. These questions also permeate the pedagogical practices and theoretical writings of Gunew, Probyn and Ang. For as Gunew and Probyn articulate, feminist work and cultural politics requires us to 'think in other languages'. Hence it is the capacity to imagine and to be able to work with the multiple voices and stories within and throughout one's own cultural and writing practice that is essential to on-going feminist and post-colonial work.

For Trinh T. Minh-ha the notion of 'multiplicity' itself is at the 'heart of both the feminist struggle and the struggle of people of colour'. Trinh works with the multiple languages of identity, film, and love to explore radical subjectivity and other forms of narrative expression. In our conversation, we discuss her film A Tale of Love, which explores layers of aesthetic and cultural translation through the Vietnamese diaspora. In the film, it is 'other senses' — olfactory, sensual, tactile — that introduce a different concept of narrative, memory and imagination. For Trinh, scent, sound and cinema are 'all experiences of transience'. As she notes, '[w]hen a forgotten scent hits you, you never know where it leads you, what it will do to you; and as a character in the film said, "by the time you realise it, it's too late". You're hurled into the dark corridors of buried memories' (see Part Two, ch. 4). By introducing the concept of 'residue' in the passage between words and images, Trinh suggests, there is always a 'deposit' that is left, and which cannot be directly communicated, in cultural and aesthetic translations. But it is this residue, how it both settles and disturbs meaning, which resonates through her writing and film work, and suggests another way to conceive of the image-making and the framing of different kinds of storytelling.

The concept 'rhythm' is also central to Trinh's way of considering a radical subjectivity and a definition of cultural relations. For her, it is rhythm which is the 'quality' that determines social relationships and artistic manifestations. In a cultural and aesthetic sense, it is the rhythm and musicality of languages that shape social relationships, Trinh suggests that, 'a body is a resonating tool and individuals are vibrating mechanisms[...] It is through spoken languages that you hear the music of a person and a people. Our language and music are our identity' (see Part Two, ch. 4). As I have argued throughout it is the rhythm of inhabiting another's work, that enables these kinds of relationships and collaborations to exist in the formation of 'new communities'. As Trinh notes, rhythm is what arouses one's ability to connect, 'proliferate, and enrich'. In some fashions, it resonates Lingis' notion of rhythm and the sensuous relations of language. For Lingis it is often the non-ver-

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9 Trinh T. Minh-ha and I further develop the relations of rhythm, 'passion' and freedom in Part Two, ch. 4.
bal elements of communication, those which are not visible, the tone of a voice, the spaces that exist between ‘us’ that determine these qualities of social relationships, and are the fabric of communal and social bonds.

Laleen Jayamanne’s experience of not recognising her voice and its rhythms when played back on a tape recorder — that is, being foreign to one’s own voice and subjectivity — became a framework and tactic for her writing and film work. In this sense, for Jayamanne, the oddity and discomfort of an ‘alien’ voice and body produced a certain way of reinventing and reworking the paradigms of her self, memory and writing. For Jayamanne, working with Walter Benjamin’s notion of mimesis, rather than the traditional Platonic view of ‘original’ and copy, is a way of seeing correspondences between incommensurable things which make these kinds of creative and artistic expression ‘happen’. She suggests that to live, write and teach involves these kinds of mimetic traces: the other really becomes other, and resemblances are those moments that exist in a ‘flash’. Indeed, for Benjamin, the magic of language and mimesis allows the ‘mediating link of a new kind of reading’ and, I would argue here, a cultural politics of translation. For Jayamanne, the mimetic mode allows one to be open to an encounter and take on new ways of staging post-colonial and critical writing. I would suggest it also brings forward a different concept of ‘time’, because the flashes and connections made between different conceptual and critical realms operate through a kind of coexistence and layered concept of reality. Thus, working with a concept of mimesis, for Jayamanne, evokes the strangeness and otherness that exist in all of kinds of encounters: between mothers and daughters, the film-maker and writer, critical theory and cultural politics.

Importantly, when I evoke the term ‘reinventing’ as referred to in Jayamanne’s case and in Sneja Gunew’s conversational essay, I mean it as a kind of re-staging and retranslation of senses of being and belonging. These translations do not underestimate the difficulties of taking up and living out the ‘in-between’ space of foreign life. Because clearly, as we discuss in our conversations, and in relation to our families, parents and histories, there can be a clinging onto identity and a refusal of ‘re-invention’. For example, the experience of migrants and their children attests to these struggles, as Hoffman points out with her mother’s experience of the ‘shtetl’, and life in a new country. Similarly, it is reflected through Ien Ang’s relation to her mother’s ‘chauvinism’ and her mother’s hanging onto a certain imaginary Chineseness. I have found this kind of chauvinism in my parents’ hankering for an imagined Greek past, and this sometimes becomes a kind of nationalistic fervour which is about how ‘all other races’ don’t quite understand or relate to their experience, their senses of belonging. At worst, this becomes a kind of defensive racism.

Trying to find a language to communicate between migrants and their children is often the most painfully lived out relationship. The experience of guilt that often comes with these generational issues involves the tensions and contradictions of inhabiting different worlds and different points in time. These tensions are often relayed in the silent communications — a facial expression,
a bodily gesture by a parent, a rebuttal for leaving one’s family and home — about a past which is often too painful to reach on the surface where the layers of meaning, foreignness and memory are lived out. These are the ‘silent scars’ and secrets passed on through the generations and which are enacted tacitly in daily ways, and in daily senses of belonging. The home, the dinner table, the mother or father who forgets or won’t remember the past — because it was too much for consciousness to bear — leave these silent scars. Eva Hoffman narrates these kinds of experiences in her books and in our conversation, where the holocaust and other atrocities have haunted the stories of her parents. This is her role as a translator, between her parents’ and her own life. The ability to relay these experiences through her writing takes the migration experiences further than a simple denial of the past, and presents the multiple layers of history, memory and silent belongings.

Through the conversations, the senses of self and the production of identity are portrayed through the ongoing prism of ‘belonging’. That is, the notion of self discussed is often about relations between being and belonging. Significantly, for Probyn, the experience of ‘outside belongings’ intersects with her own experience of lesbian identity and in the portrayal of lesbian and gay identities. For Probyn, this outsideness can be a productive force to reinsert the desires and political imaginaries that are left out of dominant articulations and fictions of the ‘self’ in contemporary theory and critical writing. In her writing and work with queer politics, she wishes to question and challenge the nostalgic view of the origins of lesbian and gay identity. As Probyn notes, nostalgia is a kind of haunting and trace of the past, but the past can be suspended and reworked in the narratives about the ‘origins’ of identity. That is, the ‘origins’ of any identity need to be viewed through the processes that construct them as ‘truths’ and the longings attached to these kinds of identification. For cultural, sexual and political identities are produced, lived and ‘individuated’, as Probyn argues, through the processes of subjectification and the negotiations with power. Importantly, for Probyn, ‘to queer’ is also to engage with a sustained analysis of ‘heterosexuality’ as well as ‘homosexuality’, just as ‘white’ post-colonialists are producing sustained analysis of whiteness. In this sense, the challenge is how to continually shift the stable categorisations of identity and of belonging.

From this perspective, nostalgia can be viewed not necessarily as a longing for a ‘past’ or an ‘origin’ of identity, but rather as a different kind of suspension and reality in the present. In this regard, I believe nostalgia is about working through how lives are lived in the present, through the histories and cultural specificities of different histories, different pasts. The concept of nostalgia that we discuss throughout the conversations is an attempt to rethink the past, present and future. That is, nostalgia is a turning back to the past that is constantly negotiated through the longings of the present. Here, the notion of foreign life can be understood through the ways in which other histories and memories are lived out in a new and foreign place. So, it is not merely about a loss of the past, but how the past figures within the present articulations of self and belonging. And, at the level of the nation, it is also about speaking and recognising the multiple pasts and presents that exist, so
that nostalgia for ‘lost national origins’ or the quest for an ‘authentic’ past do not become the basis for cultural and political imaginaries.

In the thoughts and reflections of Jayamanne, Groves and Probyn, the experience of memory as a layering of the present, or the production of the false (in Deleuze’s terms), is the way to counter the affective and often violent exclusions of cultural otherness in dominant fantasies of the nation. The production of the ‘false’ is how the processes of truth can be understood. Rather than starting from a point of origin or position of a ‘truth’ of experience, starting with the false, and perhaps ‘uneasy’ point of origin provides the way to contest memory and history. All three writers reflect on the ways Tracey Moffatt’s film work challenges notions of national origin and cultural memory. In the Australian context, Moffatt’s films challenge how Aboriginal pasts and presents can be understood. Memory, in this sense, as Jayamanne points out, is not about simply recounting what has happened, but it is the ‘capacity to invent in some way’ (see Part Two, ch. 9). In this regard, Moffatt’s work is a way of dealing with a violent history and past without necessarily reproducing that violence — it is a way of visually challenging the representation of otherness, and Aboriginality.

What I have been framing as a common thread throughout the conversations, is perhaps the irreducibility of otherness and the notion of connectedness through becoming other. Alphonso Lingis attests to this in his philosophical writings which are often the reflections of his personal experience and encounters. He suggests that the task of philosophical writing is to move out of the operative paradigms of culture and learn to speak philosophy through a language of one’s own — through the reality that is presented to us, in our encounters and engagements with the world. Writing often in third world contexts, Lingis discusses with honesty and integrity, the complicities and abuses of this relationship. As Lingis notes in our conversation, there is always an otherness that is irreducible, and that there is a ‘suffering in every friendship’. In a similar sense, one cannot escape the complicity of writing that will also exclude, depict and portray otherness in certain kinds of ways. I have suggested this requires a critical imagination and ‘recognising’ the other as other. But it is also about contesting any comfortable position that assumes to speak on and about others, rather critical writing must aim to speak ‘with’ others. It is perhaps the level of ethics and honesty that both Lingis and Groves evoke in their writing and work that is necessary in the representation of different modalities of being and communal belonging.

Alphonso Lingis notes, in our conversation and the supplementary radio dialogue, that ethics starts with at least this demand and recognition of the other. Perhaps here, it is the similarity of difference of those who stand outside the self, that offers the possibility of an ethics and communication across cultures, attuning to the multiple languages of difference and other cultural perceptions and realities. Returning to the notion of embodiment, for Lingis, the integrity and essence of meaning can be found in a kind of bodily integrity that is maintained through these transitions across language and identity. And, for Hoffman, this integrity can be found through cultural translations and
conversations, where imagination, distance and ‘commonality’ can be framed through difference. For Lingis, the ethical (his concept of otherness and language — as sensuous and evocative) connects to the philosophical and lived experiences of bodily integrity, dignity and dying. For Lingis, the courage that can be in human character and the ‘integrity’ in dying, is an ‘animal quality’ — a courage that is found from outside the limited definitions of language and the self.

For Lingis, thinking death and community is essential to how we define cultures and ways of being in the world. In these terms, the other is the ‘alien’ figure of death and the solitude involved in dying. In Lingis’ own words, we cannot think community without thinking death, because if everyone was left to die alone, ‘this would no longer be a community’. The community of ‘those who have nothing in common’ is about precisely working through this experience of otherness. But what death signals is also a catastrophe, when there is a time where ‘permanence and endurance’ break. This understanding of time and catastrophe is another way of thinking how time breaks in the present, and how it intersects with history and memory. That is, any concept of human experience is a confrontation with permanence and the break in time. Because any experience of loss or break in reality is felt in a bodily sense, where time, memory and meaning are catapulted into another realm of experience. As anyone who has experienced devastation or pleasure, the gasp of breath or the hand that comes to the mouth to ward off the shock of the new, brings together the simultaneous moments of the past and present which are lived out. In another sense, Antigone Kefala talks about the alienness of death and the function of remembrance. The experience of her mother dying and her own writing practice is about trying to have a ‘dialogue with the dead’. To think the stranger, then, is also to think our relations to time, death and communal bonds.

Rethinking the stranger and the irreducibility of otherness emerges through Julia Kristeva’s conversation and her experience of being a foreigner in France. For Kristeva, the strangeness to oneself, within language and in the experience of identity is the most contemporary form of belonging — the world, as Kristeva and Hoffman have both articulated in their life and through their writing, is increasingly made up of different perspectives — the intersections and plurality of other ways of imagining and being in the present. For Kristeva, her transformations from Bulgarian to French culture and language are expressed through a kind of ‘rebirth’, as a kind of recreation of another life, another body and another personality for herself. And, in our conversation, she discusses how in her psychoanalytic practice, fiction and critical writing, this ‘rebirth’ is about moving toward a more elementary language, one that is ‘more banal and closer to the body than concepts’.

Importantly, though, for Kristeva, the relationship between ‘aesthetic’ and cultural belonging

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10 Lingis makes reference to death and community in our conversation in Part Two of this thesis, and also in our radio dialogue.
11 Kefala and I further discuss this notion of ‘dialogues with the dead’ in the radio conversation.
12 See, for example, some of Kristeva’s novels The Samurai (1993b), The Old Man and The Wolves (1994) and Possessions (1998).
is articulated through our discussion of Marcel Proust. Kristeva notes that the notion of aesthetic belonging links to how the writer invents words 'that are foreign'. That is, 'style is a process of estrangement with regard to language, where you invent something unheard of' (see Part Two, ch. 6). One could argue that all writers experience themselves as foreign to a language in the process of writing. But for foreigners, and in Proust's life and writing, the intensity of being between or outside of a community, of being 'nowhere' in a sense, opens up the contradictions and ambiguities in words and 'things'. For Proust, these ambiguities are reflected in different concepts of memory, time and the layering of reality that emerge in his writing. To return to Kefala and Hoffman's writing, these contradictions are precisely the 'tools' that they have used to write about translation, migration and the aesthetics of experience.

It is perhaps different forms of aesthetic and cultural belonging that present the uncanny elements of writing and the condition of the sublime. But the notion of identity and belonging raises other important questions of what is considered as 'foreign' to and within a culture. Kristeva has noted that the left and traditional forms of leftism to which she has belonged, have greatly underestimated the need for concepts of identity and belonging. Ang, Salecl and Kristeva, in different ways, address how identity, the new forms of racism and subjectivity that have emerged through the categorisation of 'national communities', and multicultural societies need to be informed by the loss of identity experienced by both 'natives' (ie those whose is place is considered as 'legitimate' and 'proper') and by foreigners.

For Kristeva, the loss of identity experienced by 'natives' in communities can emerge as a form of depression, which makes forms of reconciliation harder, and restricts the ability to turn towards the other.\footnote{See Julia Kristeva's \textit{Black Sun} (1989) for some of her earlier discussions on melancholia, loss and depression.} In the Australian context, len Ang argues 'whites' are now experiencing themselves as foreigners, and this gets translated as a kind of racism born of fear, 'a feeling that others are coming into your space, and that is what's happening when Pauline Hanson says, "where do I go?"' (see Part Two, ch. 10).\footnote{Pauline Hanson is the leader of the 'One Nation Party'. Hanson, as an independent MP, was swept into the Australian parliament in 1996 on a fiercely anti-Aboriginal and migrant stance. Hanson is no longer a member of parliament, but the One Nation Party still operates and galvanises 'white' Australians in their 'struggle' against the demise of the 'white' Australian nation.} Because what was taken for granted in the past — that is, the 'uncontested' space of belonging — is now problematised for 'white' Australians by Aboriginal reconciliation and the multiple histories that make up the nation space. In this sense, then, the 'imagined' communities that emerge in the future have to take into account the plurality of loss experienced within the nation and the negotiations with different kinds of foreignness, identity and belonging. That is, the strangeness felt within one's own language, country or identity needs to also be examined and worked through in the discussions around national identity.

Significantly, for Gunew, the notion of an 'anti-racist' politics as opposed to multiculturalism
(which she argues is endemic of certain governmental strategies), would enable discussion of how different ‘ethnics’ are racialised and the interrogation of dominant constructions of identity and narratives of place. Indeed, the notion of an ‘anti-racist’ politics would involve the examination of how we live in ‘racist’ cultures and how ‘we’ are all involved in both producing and contesting racist and ethnically marked categories of belonging. Because, in some ways, we are all ‘complicit’ in various forms of racism and ethnicisation, whether it be a denial of our own histories, or the refusal to engage with other histories and ways of knowing. Working with a paradigm of ‘anti-racist’ politics would be a way of examining the ‘new’ racisms that are emerging around the world, with the fall of socialism, the rise of the right and the demise of ‘multiculturalism’.

Renata Salecl, for example, argues how notions of legitimating identity, the place of fantasy and the ‘fictions’ of community mobilise modes of ‘hate language’ toward foreigners and signals contemporary forms of nationalism. From the Slovenian context through which she writes, there is a need to interrogate the structures of national ‘fictions’ and concepts of belief after the fall of communism. For Salecl, what makes us believe links to how forms of ideology and cultural fictions are created in national communities. But it is actually certain kinds of ‘disbelief’ in power and authority that are the focus of her interest and writing on national fictions. Developing Lacan’s notion of language and symbolic structures, Salecl argues how the nation is that ‘unsymbolisable’ kernel which cannot be grasped but which is constantly referred to in what makes us believe as a community or nation. In order to consider new forms of subjectivity in post-socialist countries, as well as in the West, Salecl suggests the need to work with the ‘ungraspable’ kernel to rewrite stories of belonging. That is, the notion of a national community is necessary, but that does not mean it has to be ‘nationalist’ or pertain to nationalism. For Kristeva and Salecl, the concept of the universal is important for ‘multicultural’ societies and for the possibility of exploring otherness, because without a concept of ‘commonality’ through difference, multiculturalism they argue, can reduce ‘foreigners’ to all that is completely other and outside of the community. That is, there is a need return to some concept of the universal and ‘humanness’ through which the concepts of difference and otherness can be understood. The universal, for Salecl and Kristeva, is essential to how we can address a community of those who have nothing in common, and also to point to the ‘common strangeness’ that is part of the fabric of communal bonds.

It is perhaps love, its necessity and place in subjectivity, for the foreigner and for narratives and tales of belonging, that are rewritten and reworked in Salecl and Trinh’s discussion of foreigners. For Trinh, the experience of love, loyalty and betrayal, may be telling of ‘our times’, where the world is increasingly made up of migrant selves, mobilised by forced and voluntary migration. It is the affective reality of love, loss and betrayal felt in leaving a ‘mother’ country and the experience of ‘denationalisation’ in a new and foreign country that, as she notes, relays the difficulties of the contemporary experience of the foreigner. Moreover, for Trinh, all forms of cultural and aesthetic transla-
tion involve the coupling of love and betrayal in the articulations of self and identity. However, it is more profoundly felt when it intermingles with the processes of 'deterritorialisation' and 'loss' in a new language and country.

Somewhat differently, Salecl argues how love involves a paradoxical logic of desire. For Salecl, the paradox of desire and the 'drive' are what shape contemporary forms of (inter)subjective relations. The pains, pleasures and hostilities in love and 'hate' relations emerge out of the 'drive' to want to capture and possess how the 'other enjoys'. In love relations, it is the drive and the constant pressure to want what you 'cannot have' — that causes the pain, enjoyment and the excess of desire. It is because we cannot know how someone 'enjoys' that allows for the fantasy and enactment of love, but it is this same logic that feeds hatred and hostility toward the other. And, in the political domain, the fantasy of 'hate' and the feeling of hostility toward the foreigner is precisely the inability to possess and attain the foreigner's experience of pleasure and enjoyment.¹⁵

It should be clear by now that the question of challenging the portrayal of foreigners as always only outside and other to a community traverses all of the conversations. It is through the possibility of new forms of freedom, 'revolt' and cultural translation that we can enact different ways of writing and discussing foreignness. For Julia Kristeva, the possibility of revolt is a question that needs to be addressed in the new millennium — individual, cultural and political. For Kristeva, cultural revolt requires a return to the past in order to rework the present. That is, we need another sense of how the past inhabits, or exists, beside and within contemporary articulations of self and community. This involves a rethinking of the concept of sense and of time in the reality of cultural belonging.¹⁶ Because, for Kristeva, we can only revisit the possibility of a critical imagination through a turning or 'retour' to the past in order to move forward in individual histories, and in cultural and political life. The possibility of this imagination requires the passage through other senses of belonging and the lived realities through which we speak. This would allow for new forms of freedom, 'disbelief' and agency. In this respect, it is how narrating one's life is about rewriting the 'self' and the different concepts of memory and remembering our place in the present.¹⁷

What I have presented here is a montage and a net of relations between different experiences of foreignness and the lived reality of strangers. Like turning the corner onto a new but familiar landscape the conversations pose and re-pose questions in-between the spaces and interstices of foreign life — to shift some of the limits of thinking and speaking about foreigners. But in the light of this, I also attempt to work towards a new kind of empiricism by exploring some of the relations

¹⁵ Salecl and I discuss this point further in our radio dialogue.
¹⁶ For further elaborations of sense and time, see Julia Kristeva Proust and The Sense of Time (1993c) and Time and Sense: Proust and The Experience of Literature (1996a).
¹⁷ In all the radio dialogues attached to the thesis, I develop and extend themes that emerged in the conversations. But it is particularly pertinent in my radio dialogue with Kristeva. In this conversation, I ask Kristeva about the connections between her earlier writing on 'revolutionary' poetics and current writing on 'cultural revolt'. Here, we move to discuss her different and 'new' notions of revolt, revolution and the 'narrating' of one's life.
between dialogue, life histories and the practice of writing. In the spirit of friendships and foreign voices, the following conversations in Part Two of this thesis enact a ‘poetics’ of foreignness, which provide ways to explore the complexities of contemporary cultural identifications as a relay of different thoughts, relationships and encounters.

⋆

I began this thesis with an anecdote, a story that framed my writing around foreignness and the languages that speak through my identity. As an interlocution between Part One and Part Two, I relay another story and ‘staging’ of a conversation. This story is a re-enactment of a telephone conversation between my parents’ and myself which reflects the tensions of translating between spoken and written languages and foreign words, the collisions of classes and identities, and the multiple ways a story or conversation can be transcribed and reheard. It is here that the ‘ear of the other’ takes on another character, because the phone literally and metaphorically conveys voices, close up, so to speak — you can hear the breath and rhythm of another person directly in the ear, but you are separated from the other by the distance of telecommunication. This intimacy and distance is portrayed through the languages and speeches of foreignness in my phone conversation and in the retelling of the story. And, as Hélène Cixous notes, “On the telephone I hear your breath, — all your breaths that sigh between the words and around the words[...] The far in the near. The outside in the inside’ (1997: 48-49).
SPECTRES OF PLACE —
A RE-ENACTMENT OF A PHONE CONVERSATION.
ACT ONE

CHARACTERS:
DAUGHTER AT HER HOME IN MARRICKVILLE, SYDNEY.
PARENTS AND BROTHER AT THEIR HOME MOUNT DRUITT, OUTER WESTERN SUBURBS OF SYDNEY.

SCENE ONE
DAUGHTER CALLS HER PARENTS' AT HOME.
Daughter: Hello, I'm wanting to ask you how you say 'spectres of place' in Greek? I'm wanting to call a radio essay this, and I want to say the title in English and then in Greek. Because it's about Greek issues and themes...
I've looked up the words in the Greek dictionary, so I can spell the letters out in Greek, but can you tell me how to say it in Greek?
Mother: Can you spell the letters?

[IN GREEK]
Daughter: Yes, I have, I can spell them from the Greek dictionary...

SHE BEGINS.
'f'

SHE TRIES TO SAY WHAT SHE UNDERSTANDS TO BE THE TRANSLATION OF THE GREEK LETTERS.
'f' — foosta

SHE LOOKS AT A GREEK ALPHABET BOOK TO VOICE THE CORRECT LETTER.
How do you say the 'f' sound in Greek? It doesn't matter... the next letter is a — 'alpha'.
Mother: What was that? 'f'

[IN ENGLISH]
Daughter: You know the 'F' sound in Greek, you know, 'f' — foosta
alpha, then...

FATHER COMES ON THE LINE AND INTERJECTS.
Father: Say it in English...

[IN GREEK]
Daughter: spectre—s p e c — tre
You know, haunting, ghosts.
Father: What specs? glasses?

[IN ENGLISH AND GREEK]
Ask your brother he can speak English and Greek, he’ll know what you’re saying.

BROTHER COMES ON THE LINE.

Brother: What is the word?

[IN ENGLISH]
Daughter: Spectre...
Brother: spectre... hmmm, spectacular, spectacle...
Daughter: No spectre!! SPECTRE.
Brother: I’ll just go and look it up in the dictionary... to find out the meaning of... spectre.

FATHER COMES BACK ON THE LINE.

Father: Say it again, in Greek...

[IN ENGLISH]
Daughter: phan s— a s —mta, ma

SHE READS FROM THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE GREEK WORD IN THE DICTIONARY.

Father: Was that, f or s in English?
Daughter: NO! S not F.
Father: ... is that in English or Greek?
Daughter: No it’s in English, but I’m trying to say it in GREEK!
phantasma, phantasma
That’s what the dictionary says!
Darnn it, FUCK IT — spectre, you know spectre!!!
phant-tas-ma

FATHER LEAVES — ANNOYED AT HIS DAUGHTER’S OUTBURST... AND SAYS TO HIS WIFE, WHY DID SHE NEVER LEARN GREEK?

BROTHER COMES BACK ON THE LINE.
Brother: (VOICE HIGH-PITCHED) It means to think too much...

DAUGHTER THINKS HE’S ONLY SAYING THIS BECAUSE OF THE VOICES...

Daughter: No, NO — it means phantom, ghost — I know what it means — how do you say it in Greek!!!?

FATHER TAKES THE HANDSET.
Father: Okay, spell it in English.

[IN ENGLISH]
Daughter: s-p-e-c-t-r-e...
Okay, in the Greek dictionary the English is spelt as
phantasma,

Father: phan-tas-ma

Daughter: Is that how you say it: phan-tas-ma?

SHE WANTS HER FATHER’S APPROVAL.

Father: mmm, yes, it means haunting.

Daughter: Okay, now the rest of it, I’ve got spectre, but now how do you say ‘of place’?

FATHER GETS FED UP AND MOTHER COMES BACK ON THE LINE.

Daughter: The Greek dictionary says that ‘of’ means —

πό — that means ‘of’ doesn’t it?

Mother: Spell it?

[IN GREEK]

Daughter: a-π-ό, you know ‘of’

o-f

Mother: ‘os’ oss, what are you saying?

Daughter: no o-f, f like fred, fred....!! OF — you know, the thing between things!

Mother: aπο?

Daughter: Yes! AπO

(While she is reading the sounds and spelling from the Greek dictionary that day, there is a first grade alphabet book open on the phone table. In the Greek book the π letter and corresponding picture have a girl pointing to a ball and alongside a duck is pushing the ball with its beak. The Greek words appear as something like this: παζι, ποτι πετα to τοτι. In the English translation, it would be something like: ‘the duck is throwing the ball’.

That night the daughter had a dream. In the dream, a duck appeared in a bucket — it was curled up like a ball, but it wasn’t clear whether it was dead or alive... Somewhere else, in her back garden or in another house she saw the duck again. Later in the dream, the duck and the daughter became constant companions, it followed her around like a dog.

She thinks later, when telling the sound technician at the radio studio about the dream and showing him the Greek alphabet book, that the duck, like the of — aπο, is both a kind of preposition and the navel of her dream — the carrier between foreign words, images and voices...)

FATHER IS NOW BACK ON THE LINE.

Daughter: How do you say place in Greek?

In the dictionary it says topos or in the dictionary it says meros

Father: Ah, you can say it as meros

[IN GREEK]
DAUGHTER INTERJECTS.

But which is proper: *meros* or *topos*?

Father: Well, it can be, well it can be either one, but either one will be wrong, because you need to say 'ena meros': one place — you can’t just say: of place.

-IN GREEK AND ENGLISH-

Daughter: No, I don’t want to say one place, I want to say the haunting or spectre of many places...
So how do I say it...?

Is it phantasma ἀπό topos?

Does that sound right?

Father: No, it’s not the right meaning — you should say ‘one’ in Greek before topos...

Daughter: No! I don’t care! I don’t care if the meaning is right or wrong in Greek... Does it sound right when I say it in GREEK? I just want to say spectres of place, and then in Greek: phantasma ἀπό topos...

Father: ... hmm

Daughter: Does it sound like an Australian saying it, When I Say It... Or does it sound like a Greek? I want to know what my accent sounds like.

SHE GETS A BIT DESPERATE AND DOUBTFUL AT THE SAME TIME.

Do I sound like a GREEK?

FATHER AND THEN MOTHER: Well, yes, you can sound like... it will pass for Greek...

DAUGHTER SAYS OKAY AND HANGS UP THE PHONE, FRUSTRATED.

PARENTS’ HANG UP AWARE OF THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND THEIR DAUGHTER.

THE PHONE CONVERSATION HAS TAKEN OVER AN HOUR.¹

¹ Spectres of Place was the title I used for the separate radio dialogue and essay with Christos Tsiolkas (1999b).
Part Two: Foreign Dialogues

Arriving at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places...

Italo Calvino, 1997, 28-29
Life in a New Language
Eva Hoffman

Eva Hoffman writes on the collision of cultures and complexities of geographical displacement. Her experiences of migration, foreign languages and new identities shape her book Lost in Translation.¹ We met at Eva’s London house in April 1996. We began our conversation by locating each other’s interest in cultural collisions and geographical spaces that carry a vast array of migrant stories. We talked about the experience of translation and life in a new language; gender and femininity in different cultural contexts; transgenerational issues that affect migrant parents and their children; the traumas, pains and memories that are tied to migration; and the particular experience of being Jewish in Poland and Canada. I asked Eva about her experience of writing about translation and life in a new language.

I

Lost in Translation

Writing is an attempt to close the gap on the sense of being estranged from myself. In my case, this estrangement happened very much in daily perceptions and daily life. In a sense, writing is the attempt to find a language that is embedded in yourself and that somehow you know can express the self directly. I know that is a kind of dream and not completely attainable, but it is the attempt to find a language which sort of bubbles up directly.

I don’t know if I have a coherent philosophy of language. But my notions of language have to do with its relationship to subjectivity. The one lesson of my experience is that the first language seems to be attached to identity with a kind of absoluteness, so that it seems to be coeval with identity and with the world; words seem to stand for the things they describe. Subsequent languages don’t have that kind of absoluteness — I mean that one is aware of a second language much more qua language qua its own system.

The immediate condition of writing Lost in Translation was marginal to the subject of the book. I was working at The New York Times and I was mostly editing and doing some journalistic articles. At some point I realised that I was becoming envious of my writers, and I thought this was a very bad state for an editor! So I thought it was time to try writing, which I had wanted to do for a long time. I had been preoccupied with the subject of language and self-translation and I thought about approaching it in various ways. I thought of doing a series of essays on the theme of language and then I realised that I probably needed to be more of a linguist than I was and more of a scholar in that field. I also thought of writing about Eastern European writers in the West. But then I started realising that what I actually wanted to talk about was not just language but the conjunction of

¹ Eva Hoffman has written regularly about literature, culture and politics for various publications, although most notably for The New York Times. Associated readings for this conversation and chapter include Lost In Translation (1989), Exit into History (1994) and Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews (1998).
language and identity, and that to do that I needed a case study — and the case study I knew best was myself. It needed to be done from within a subjectivity since it was so much about subjectivity. I decided to write it as a memoir — quite reluctantly because I am not a confessional person at all. I didn’t want to expose myself, but I thought this was how the subject needed to be approached.

The first real condition which spurred me to write about my immigration was the peculiar experience of being virtually without language for a short while. It was because I came to Canada without English and because Polish became completely unusable, and for reasons which probably did have to do with the circumstances of my immigration and, you know, psychological stuff. I somehow hid my Polish. I suppressed it. So I was without language — and I was without internal language, and that was a terribly traumatic experience which I never quite forgot and which haunts me still.

I think this kind of radical state of language loss lasted… well I don’t know, perhaps not even a year. But it was a very quick lesson in the vital importance of language to one’s identity. It was not a state which could be sustained, so I started to try filling the gap with English. But that was a terribly long process, I mean in the sense that the language didn’t quite belong to me, that it wasn’t quite inside, that it wasn’t mine. I would say this lasted — I know it is shocking — for about twenty years (even while I was writing my dissertation in English literature at Harvard University and all of that). For the language to become really mine took a terribly long time.

My immigration, which is described in the book, was very much my parents’ decision. I was thirteen at the time and they made a decision which made all kinds of sense from their point of view. We were living in Communist Poland, and we were Jewish, so there were all these good reasons to emigrate. I think my parents felt that they were doing it for the children to a large extent but, for many reasons, I just absolutely balked at it. I didn’t want to emigrate. It was in a way the wrong time. If it had happened a few years later I would have known why we were emigrating and I would have been much more willing to do it. As it was, I was being yanked out of my world and, you know, the process of growing up — out of childhood and the beginnings of adolescence which I felt were very happy, so…

We went from Cracow to Vancouver. One probably cannot think of two places on Earth which were, particularly at that time, more culturally remote from each other. I mean, they were really antipodes. Cracow was a very old, very beautiful city with layers of history and, at that time as it happened, in a kind of stasis; while Vancouver, at that time, was a kind of new frontier town which was economically booming but culturally very raw. They really were very far from each other! Especially since this was for me an unwanted immigration and since I loved Cracow so much and was so nostalgic, the degree of cultural shock, of dislocation and loss, was very extreme.

The immigration was wretchedly difficult for my parents, but on the other hand they were the ones who had made the decision and so they knew why they were doing it. The formative expe-
rience for them was the Holocaust and the experience of horror, terror and great suffering. That was absolutely formative and of course that carried over to Canada, although I don’t think they would have said it, or that they were even very aware of it. But I do think that the kind of new shock of immigration brought up all of those feelings of extremes of insecurity, anxiety, depression and loss. They could cope with it in Poland, but then the next blow made it harder for them to cope with all of that — so they had a very hard time.

* 

I am becoming more conscious of the experience of being Jewish in Poland now. For a while, the whole problem was pushed into the background by the problem of immigration — which was the foreground problem. Again, all of this would have changed had I stayed in Poland longer. But, on a true linguistic level, Yiddish didn’t influence me very much. I suppose that the sense of being in a marginal position might have, but I didn’t know it yet. I didn’t feel marginal. I am only beginning to work this out now. If I think about it, there was a kind of doubleness (in language) even then. But the immigration was so much more extreme an experience of this that it sort of overshadowed the other.

The extremes of immigration and of living in a second language are a kind of exacerbation of the experience of being alienated from oneself, and of having language de-familiarised. I suppose this is something that every writer experiences, but it becomes exacerbated in a second language, so that the sense of one’s own otherness becomes all too natural. My desire to see language as a Möbius strip (in Lost in Translation) was a desire to describe how language encompasses the world in the way that it seemed to in the first instance.

Writing Lost in Translation was therapeutic for me, but that was a surprise. I didn’t set out for it to be therapeutic. And I didn’t know it would be. What was therapeutic was not only a sense that I had found a voice — I used the voice which I had at my disposal and it seemed to work — but that the book was received very generously and I had the feeling that I had been heard. It was very surprising to me that it was received so well, I mean I didn’t write with a belief that it would be — quite the contrary! And that enabled me to put the problem of immigration to rest much more than before, because I think that one of the obsessions driving me was the sense that nobody really heard or understood this particular experience. I thought I was terribly idiosyncratic, and thought ‘who would make any sense of it?’ So that was a surprise, but it was very cathartic and gave me a feeling of completion.

I played around with different titles for Lost in Translation, though this one did seem fairly apt. But I wanted to play on the two senses of the word ‘lost’. There is a Frost poem that says ‘what’s lost in translation is the poetry’, and on many levels I think this is true. But also I wanted to play on the connotation of ‘lost’ as in being absorbed, being sort of entranced by translation, because the
process of self-translation has become very absorbing to me. I was entranced and preoccupied and obsessed by it...

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II

*Bodily Memories*

*The body can also be a site of ‘translation’ that expresses a kind of language and experience. In Lost in Translation you write about the experience of language, the sense of loss and nostalgia that settles on your body as you walk through the streets of Vancouver. You describe this as a phantom pain and I wonder how this pain and memory might be a translation of the body.*

The essence of traumatic memory is precisely that it is carried in the body — that it becomes very concrete — well, here we are getting to psychoanalytic categories. In a way, I was simply describing the experience which I’d had, but, if one is to be analytical about it, it was a traumatic memory that I was carrying within me. In other words, there was a kind of sense of traumatic loss and it was so strong that it became physicalised. I suppose one reason that this was happening to me was because of my isolation; I felt that I had to carry this inside myself because there was nobody to share it with. There was nobody to whom this could be spelt out and there was nobody to contain these memories, so they impinged on me very powerfully.

*What is interesting, I think, in terms of translation is the notion of ‘bodily styles’ — how gender and sexuality become styled when moving between cultures (which you write about). How do you see different encounters with sexuality frame or become another mode of translation and language of the body?*

I didn’t naturally think of it in feminist terms, precisely because the immigration was the big term, but there was no question that there was translation and transposition of femininity and of gender. The notions of femininity in Poland, when I was growing up, seen from our vantage point now, were much more progressive than the notions of femininity I found in Canada or in America. There was an idea of female authority in Poland and of some moral parity, or emotional parity, which was there in the culture, and which may be partly explained by the political history — the history of Polish uprisings and insurrections — in which women participated as much as men. There were professional women in Poland before the war, much more so than in America, and this was one dimension in which the communists, I think, did some good. Equality between men and women was very much taught in schools and it fell on rather receptive ground. I guess we are talking of the educated classes, but not entirely. So there was a notion of strong women and of specifically feminine power and authority. This was not at all in contradiction with notions of sexuality. After the war, Poland was a terribly libertine culture — in a more equal way than I have seen in other countries... In other words, men had affairs and women had affairs and this was accepted (I’d known about it
since I was nine or ten). It was talked about rather freely. When I came to Canada and to the States there was an extreme polarisation of gender. Girls tried to be very feminised and had all of these ideas about submission to men and accommodating them, not talking too much and not being too smart and other ridiculous notions. I certainly was not a feminist at that point, but I found all of this incredibly uncomfortable... And I continued to have glimmers of the Polish women I knew and other notions of femininity.

It did seem a bizarre and uncomfortable adolescent sexual code that I encountered. But I was an adolescent and wanted to have friends — I wanted boyfriends. So I tried accommodating myself to this, but it was very uncomfortable and very strained... I think it didn't work for me at all. There were literally different ideas of what was attractive. I was considered very attractive in Poland and now I was considered not very attractive at all in Canada. And I became less attractive as I started hunching and feeling timid and nervous etc...

I felt very strongly that the body was somehow styled differently and that I was required to move differently: to have a different hairdo, wear different shoes and all of that. This has so much to do with inner gestures and postures as well... I don’t think that gender is originally a bodily language, but I think the psyche manifests itself absolutely in the body. One’s psychic postures become very evident in the body in more or less subtle ways. It becomes, after a while, a chicken and egg proposition. I mean that the body affects one’s psyche, but one can see the psyche being inscribed in the body. Different body styles can be felt as another form of alienation from oneself, I mean you literally find yourself in a foreign body and if you translate yourself into this different style you have translated yourself into a different personality.

*

III

Cultural Translations

Having more than one language and perspective offers the possibility to imagine language and cultural identities differently. But the question of cultural translation poses the issues of ‘(mis)communication’ in multi-ethnic societies. The complexities of language in a predominantly Anglophone nation such as Australia, for instance, involves the difficulties of negotiating cultural differences and different languages within this framework. It also involves the question of people’s integrity, that is, how people can maintain a sense of self and bodily integrity in translation. It seems to me that mobility and personal integrity are incredibly important.

Ultimately, if translation doesn’t break you it can enrich you very much. And one adds a whole new perspective on the world, a whole new vision of the world, a whole new internal world,
really. In a way this is something that everyone goes through. It is partly the process of growing up. But it is very extreme if it is compounded by immigration, and it also means that one is very conscious of it — both of the rifts between two identities and of the meldings, if they do happen eventually. But I think that it has been a broadening experience... Our world is full of mobility, immigration and expatriation. It seems nearly impossible to live in the contemporary world without having two perspectives.

I think cultural conversation is crucial, and the breakdown of it in the States is very dangerous... When I was in New York I was struck by the degree of fragmentation — at a daily, banal level. People can't talk to each other because of the multiplicity of languages. Well this, it seems to me, is socially catastrophic. I think we need to talk to each other. So I think if we agree to live in societies we have to agree to make that much of an accommodation. I think that society needs a common language. I mean it can have two common languages but they had better be common, they had better be shared...

The creation of multicultural societies seems to be a very difficult experiment — I am not sure we quite know how to go about it, it is not obvious. I think acculturation can't be forced and the sense of the difference (of integrity) needs to be recognised. I think you do need the notion of the universal somewhere in there, a notion of common humanity or some common ground...

*

In your second book, Exit into History (and in Lost in Translation), you maintain an 'integrity' of the self through various forms of cultural displacement and fragmentation experienced. In Exit into History you travel back to a post-communist Eastern Europe, and this raises the question of political change and identity for me. That is, how did returning to Poland and the Eastern Bloc change how you wrote about your identity?

Exit into History was written much later than the experiences described in Lost in Translation — that needs to be taken into account. I was travelling through Eastern Europe while the changes of 1989 were in progress. So certainly those changes have moderated my sense of extreme difference and of the rift between the two worlds, and perhaps between the two parts of my identity. But that was already happening. However, it is a moderation which is now happening within Eastern Europe and within the West. I have a sense of loss which is now shared with people in Eastern Europe concerning some of the things which will go in this process of re-entering the wider world. One of the things which is going very quickly is a slower pace of time. This was one of the great unintended side benefits of that very stagnant and static system — but it was a very real benefit. I am beginning to think that time is one of the most obvious and at the same time most hidden contemporary social problems. Eastern Europeans are losing the slower time which was so delightful and which enabled
people to savour, relish, reflect, think, all of those things which are so difficult to accomplish now in our very busy lives...

*The issue of time is an important one, particularly the disjuncture of time and the differences that exist between migrant children and their parents as they travel through different historical and social landscapes. And how we can be caught in the 'paradoxical task of our generation' — carrying on some of the experiences and burdens of our parents as we attempt to make meaning between their past and our present.*

My mother made an enormous leap in social and historical time — one which my sister and I have had to make as well. My mother still lives in a kind of 'shtetl' mentality. She is a deeply intelligent and clever person but, in terms of a psyche, she was very much formed by the shtetl, which in turn was a very traditional culture. So for her it has been a leap from the nineteenth century to the later part of the twentieth, and of course with immigration these leaps do happen...

The paradox and benefit of living in different times is that it gives you a kind of historical scope, a long view. When I was travelling through Eastern Europe I thought that Bulgaria had an attractive intelligentsia. And one reason for this, I thought, was because it was so close to its rural past and roots. I think that kind of double experience — double extremes of time — gives you a perspective that is enriching. I feel that I can see the contemporary world from an angle, and that I can also imagine something which really is deeply and subjectively different, a different historical sensibility and different historical period. That is a vantage point for the imagination and it is very stimulating — I don't know if that is what you had in mind, if that is what you are asking about?

*I am thinking that the role of imagination creates a distance, and having a doubleness or different perspective enables a distance or, if you like, the possibility of being able to imagine different futures, different sorts of ways of writing the past.*

Imagination needs distance, and when you have these distances within yourself then you can see... It awakens vision and creates arcs of space and time within which you can see. Otherwise, if you don't have this distance, you cannot see yourself internally and you become your own blind spot. Wordsworth said: 'poetry is emotion recollected in tranquillity'. But things need to be re-seen, re-envisioned or envisioned in the first place. You cannot do this if you are completely embedded within your subjectivity, within yourself. Then you cannot really see. And I think incidentally that distance from yourself is needed for common social ground. The common ground exists in that space in which we are not absolutely and completely subjective... And we need to get away from this absolute subjectivity for the sake of something in common. If you have only your very private and inward identity then, in a sense, you cannot know yourself sufficiently, and it seems to me that you cannot know others; there has to be some movement of empathy, a kind of leaping out of yourself.
We travel, we go literally above the ground. We see very concretely that we are not the only place and the only centre... we can see the world is made up of many parts. I think we are becoming more sensitive to relativity, difference and otherness, and I think western countries are becoming less provincial. They just have to be, and they have to grapple with these issues. The question in my mind nowadays is how to reconcile this with some cohesion and sense of commonality. In a way, being in London has been a decrease in pressure for me, this being a fairly mild place. I keep joking that London turns out to be the perfect midway point between Manhattan and Cracow, and I think NW6 is probably the exact midway point. It is, along so many axes, a kind of synthesis and a midway point. So it feels very reconciling and I am just trying to live for a while rather than ponder strenuously all the time...
The Extraordinary Ordinary
Elspeth Probyn
The extraordinary ordinary poses questions and themes around the complexities of cultural and sexual belonging(s). Elspeth Probyn’s book Outside Belongings maps geo-sexual desire that travels across the body and surface of sociality. This opens the space to consider relations of desire and the geography of movement. How do we write about experience and desire through different sexual, cultural and political zones? How do we produce new theoretical and political places from which to speak across and between identities?

I met Elspeth Probyn at the University of Sydney (where she is the Director of Women’s Studies) in September 1996. We talked about her most recent writing on queer desire, belonging and nostalgia, and we discussed the modes of writing and theorising that articulate through a different ‘tone’ the complexities of living and being. I asked Elspeth about her own experience of belonging — her recent migration from Québec to Australia. And how this experience of migration traverses personal, cultural and theoretical identities.¹

I

Outside Belongings

The decision to emigrate is obviously a massive one. Emigration thrust me into a whole set of relations of proximity that I’d not been in before or not been in for a long time. I take the image of relations of proximity from Michel Foucault, and the notion of surface as an imbrication of forces that one encounters in very immediate ways. For instance, the different levels of bureaucracy and the different types of panics they generate (even if they are not generating them on an individual level) can be really scary. I was certainly scared going through all the processes of migration myself, and even though I kept thinking of how I constituted one of the more privileged bureaucratic categories — white single professional woman — it was as if those bureaucratic levels had created ghosts and layers of panic and I was caught in very tangible ways. For me, immigration folded and pleated together different moments of my past. At one point I was trying to pinpoint exactly what was scaring me so much, and I recalled how we travelled all the time when I was young. Because of my father being in the army, my family moved at odd times and my sister and I were being wrenched out of schools and that sort of thing; then I left home at sixteen to go to university six thousand miles away and started to earn my own living. I suppose moving again brought to the surface memories of vulnerability and ‘precarity’. If a life consists of layers upon layers, in a way the event of emigrating from Québec to Australia was like drilling a hole right through to another level.

For me, events like these operate at both a personal and a theoretical level. So, to shift from

the individual term to the theoretical, those experiences are predicated in and produce precarity (if that’s an actual word) — the precarious nature of our existence, of our belonging. This experience then feeds into how I think and vice versa. Quite often as I am riding my bike home from work I’ll be caught by a smell, or a vision, which will transport me to somewhere else, a moment out of time that is nevertheless stitched into the fabric of what one lives. And, of course, upon arrival in a new place one is thrust into contact with people in very different ways. For the first couple of months in Australia I talked endlessly to bus drivers and people on the corner of the street, cab drivers and all the rest in ways that I don’t any longer, now that the extraordinary has become ordinary. The type of stories and narratives that I encountered were fascinating and perhaps people are freer to talk to someone who looks lost and new. Mind you, the conversations ranged from the touching to the blatantly racist. In one instance, an old lady on the bus said that I was ‘doubly welcome to Australia’ because I was white; I doubt she would say that if there hadn’t been the excuse of my own foreignness. As a new migrant you experience things in very immediate ways, which is why I am drawn to the metaphor of the ‘skin’ as a kind of surface — your skin is somehow rubbed a bit rawer and it attracts and registers these experiences.

Québec was and still is a very important place for me. I spent fourteen years of my life there, and in a way — again thinking in terms of folding, and to use a rather contested term — Québec is an invaginated and enfolded type of place. As a small pocket of Francophone culture within Anglophone Canada, which itself is within North America, Québec is constantly refolding stories of origins. For instance, Québec public television has all these narratives about the turn of the century that are continually folded in with modern elements such as independent women and feminism, which is a relatively new and powerful force. So as a sort of laboratory of enfolded culture, it is fascinating. And, for me, it was a daily experience in the limits of the belonging. The multitude of narratives that circulate state fairly unequivocally that you have to be ‘de souche’ (of the original stock), so it is not even good enough to be born in Québec. And those who ‘truly’ belong wear their heritage in a very surface, visible way — I was always astounded that no matter how well I spoke French (which I do and I certainly did better then) there was something about me that would be marked as an Anglophone or ‘other’ because of how I looked, walked and dressed, as well as the fact that my French is a kind of an amalgam of all sorts of weird accents. It was a very salutary pedagogic lesson in experiencing the limits of belonging.

When I first started playing around with this notion of belonging, I was following on from some ideas in my book Sexing the Self. The notion of being and longing, and the way in which desire shifts, and the ontological stakings involved in this process, were shifted when I was writing those essays. So, when I came to write Outside Belongings those shifts were being articulated. The focus on belonging and queer was an engagement with the rise of queer theory, the new forms of thinking and acting — this was really exciting and was something I experienced more outside of Québec. But it also joined with something
that comes, for me, from the way that in Wales (where I grew up) we used to call things 'weird' or rather 'wee-ird' — that there is something very queer in the more standard senses of belonging. So, in that sense, queer for me is not really a coherent body but rather a nexus of various different lines, and I would say the impulse that I followed was a transversal move, connecting with things that don't seem to belong together, with the aim of making them 'wee-ird' — what Eve Sedgwick has called the transversality of queer — queer as a verb. The notion 'to queer' is very appealing, so long as this move doesn't become rarefied. The last chapter of my book, 'Disciplinary Desires — The Outside of Queer Feminist Cultural Studies', was written in reaction to the institutional moves, as well as the backlashes and polemics, that were and are being launched against queer. It was a real pain to write, because I had to define queer and it did go in the face of everything that I had wanted to do and of the spirit in which I had wanted to write about it. But, I suppose, following Stuart Hall, there are moments of closure when you do have to struggle over the meaning of words, theories and cultural movements. It is not something that I want to defend at all odds, but there is a chance for queer if it keeps to that central motivating force which is to queer.

* 

In Outside Belongings you bring together this notion of 'to queer' with post-colonial theories. At one point you say there is a risk in this move. What are some of the risks and how do these risks enable the space 'to queer' and other notions of 'difference' which surface throughout your most recent writing?

I think the passage you are referring to moves from talking about a lovely novel by Ellen Galford, The Dyke and the Dybbuk, to Homi Bhabha's beautiful description of migration as the periphery being gathered in the cafes of the metropole. I'd say the risk comes from generalising and equating queers and migrants. To talk about the world becoming post-colonial or the world becoming queer are both unacceptable. There are other arguments about how 'queer nation' implicitly builds and replays queer as white middle class, and therefore as an extremely exclusive club. I think the links between them can be enabling, but perhaps queer has more to learn from post-colonial writers, just as it still has from feminism, than the other way around. Some of my favourite kinds of arguments, like Achille Mbembe's notion of the banality of post-colonial power, are akin to some queer writing in that it has nothing to do with queers or even about sexuality per se. The historical weight of Achille's argument creates a certain density that can't be performed as a flip queer move. But of course there are some forms of queer theory that have opened theoretical spaces that are also necessary for post-colonial thinking. And we are seeing some interesting shifts: out of queer comes a sustained analyses of heterosexuality, not [just] homosexuality, and that white post-colonials are producing sustained analyses of whiteness. This is where you could have a really interesting meeting ground.

To shift the obviousness of the central terms is itself an obvious statement after decades of post-structuralism, but nonetheless remarkably few analyses of heterosexuality or whiteness are
done by people who inhabit those locations. Strangely enough the most acute analyses of heterosexuality were done by radical lesbians, and until recently it was black feminists who undertook critiques of whiteness. While this isn’t really strange, in that whiteness impinges more forcibly and violently on black than whites, just as heterosexuality does on non-heterosexuals, hopefully there will be more and more studies that will critically analyse these terms from the point of view of how they are lived. It’s really just another chapter in rendering the invisible norm visible, and open to scrutiny.

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II

Bodies, Memories, Images

*Your work brings together a feminist rewriting of Deleuze and Foucault, and questions of belonging — queer and otherwise. How have these writers influenced the way you re-conceive notions of community, self, and belonging, which are weaved throughout your writing?

Foucault’s work has been absolutely determining, so much so that it sometimes feels slightly ridiculous being so imbued with it. When I went back to university to do postgraduate study I was still working in restaurants, and I would read Foucault in bars between shifts — I held onto The Order of Things as a lifeline against having to go back to working full time as a waitress. Who knows how one reads things, why one ends up studying what one studies. But in regards to certain themes I tended to stay away from some of the books that have been central to other feminists, such as Discipline and Punish, and even The History of Sexuality Volume One. I moved more to the latter work (which is obviously dependent on reading the rest of his writing), precisely because it was so powerful about ways of living and thinking differently. But then Foucault’s later writings about the technologies of the self connects in quite powerful ways with his writings in the sixties on Raymond Roussel, and his writings on fiction. The connection and the intersection of Deleuze and Foucault is fabulous (and this is not to undermine Deleuze’s own work), but when you read one and then the other it performs what they are arguing. If there is something that I still hope to do, it is to perform what I am arguing in styles of writing, as opposed to having signposts that say ‘here is the argument’, ‘here are the theorists’. In this boom of Deleuze and Guattari, and even before in the Foucaultian boom, there weren’t a lot of feminists that were invited into ‘serious’ debates, and if they were they had to do the critique of docile bodies in regards to women and oppression. But this type of haggling over what is not supposedly in their work has never been terribly interesting to me. In terms of the connection between Deleuze and Foucault, I think there is still a lot to be done — not to discount the work that is already coming out, that is.

In regards to this, how do you perform your writing rather than being indebted to the ‘boys’. How does this ‘style’ or performance frame your writing in terms of a kind of methodology (to use this term loosely)?

100
Although it doesn’t overly preoccupy me, the question of feminists’ relationships to male theorists is still important. Yesterday in my PhD class we had a lively discussion about writing as a feminist; some of my students felt this question keenly. In some ways this may be a harder question for younger feminists than it was for me, partly because I was always the token feminist in my classes — or the token dyke feminist or token dyke feminist cultural studies person in departments where I’ve worked — and it was bloody obvious what I was writing because people were attacking me for it. But I don’t know if I have a methodology per se. What I have been trying to do in Outside Belongings, more than in Sexing the Self, is to engage less in the negative critiques that we are all taught at university, as tends to be the way in the academic world. But also I have tried to show my tremendous respect for ideas and concepts. I suppose that the way I worked in Outside Belongings was to take an idea and work through it in a way that is not necessarily in the direction that the idea wants to take. So you take up an idea and push it along to see where it gets you. This carries a whole lot of caveats, because there are such things as just getting it wrong; I have probably done that sometimes, but it can also take you to interesting places. It is not a methodology as such, but I have always tried to think ideas and tangible bits (or what might be termed ‘the empirical ground’) together. If I get stuck trying to figure out something, I’ll just start writing about some minute little thing, hoping that will take me to the argument — sometimes it doesn’t.

§

In Outside Belongings you write about being called a ‘sociologist of the skin’. How does the notion of surface and skin frame some of your approaches to writing and research?

In some ways this goes back to being located in a Sociology Department for seven years without any background in sociology. I always had the weird idea that sociology was somehow kind of glamorous, not quite an anthropologist, but an anthropologist of the local and the social. Colleagues called me ‘une sociologue de la peau’ (‘a sociologist of the skin’) after I had edited a very prestigious and quite staid Francophone sociology journal issue on bodies and subjectivities which the editorial committee found too philosophical, too essayist, too personal, too this too that, and not sociological enough. So, I was forced to think about how I could inhabit the interstices of sociology/not sociology in order to think about modes of inquiry and research of and through the skin. In a way, it is not an image that I overly push in the book, although it is suggestive of many of the themes I do take up. I think there is something about the surface where supposedly internal and internalised processes of socialisation, or whatever you want to call it, appear on the skin. So there is that notion of the skin as surface. But there is also that way in which you can encounter a situation, a text or whatever that will send a frisson up your skin. I find that moment of recognition and of being seized interesting. At the end of the book (in the postscript) I talk about my emigration to Australia, and the way in which the metaphor of the skin was no longer sufficient; it was more about the tripe, the guts that
were at work, so to speak. The skin, as I mentioned before, captures the rawness and registers the effects, but the gut is where it is felt and digested. Although I wouldn't want to labour the gut image too far, it does take up what other feminists have raised in regard to writing and styles of argumentation, notably Rosi Braidotti, when she talks about risk. And I want to keep away from the slightly precious tone that people can get about their writing. Writing is not political per se, but it can be rendered as such; life per se isn't political either, but ways of inhabiting both the social and your own body - skins, guts and all - can be.

What is interesting in your writing is the way you bring together different 'scripts' - like autobiography, fiction, theory. This opens up another way of writing and reading, if you like, a different sort of sociology or cultural studies. It is a challenge to the ways empirical work has been done in the past. There is a kind of purity to empiricism - a belief that empirical work doesn't need critical scrutiny or can't be contaminated by theoretical reflections or life histories. What I find exciting (and political) is how different weavings of life, experience and theory can extend 'our' notions of empirical work.

Perhaps what is important is to think about ideas and images as having different properties, and that they pull in different ways. In trying to bring together a sense of the empirical with different theories that are abstractions of the observable, one hopes that the different levels of description will come together. I haven't read through Outside Belongings since it was published, so I don't know if the theoretical bits remain undigested, but the idea is that they don't, they digest - they break down and recombine with other images. Ultimately what I would like is that all of these different levels or different registers of image, or what you would call scripts, would form a multidimensional depiction.

* 

Hyphenated Bodies

I want to return to the issue raised earlier about the relations of proximity, and theorising notions of the surface. In Outside Belongings you write about the notion of proximity through Henri Bergson's writing on memory and image, and his work on the 'hyphen'. Bergson reworks the relation between memory and time, and the connection (or hyphenation) of different bodies and images. How does the notion of 'hyphenated bodies' offer another kind of image or imaging of history, of present and future relations.

I take from Bergson and the notion of the hyphen (although I am far from a Bergsonian expert) in order to think about how different images are hyphenated. Elizabeth Grosz takes from Deleuze the idea of how different parts are connected; that different images don't have to be necessarily connected, but that they have a historical weight of connection - for instance, the hand and pen, the nose and the rose - and if you push that and extrapolate from that you can start to think about the different hyphenations and connections amongst and between individuals and groups. This
is to consider that we are all 'becoming-other' than what we think we are. But this is not merely the whim of the individual. What I think the concept of becoming radically forces us to think about is how forms of connection and hyphenation are also due to different organisations of capital and geopolitical relations. For me, going back to your question about Foucault, this is what I understood to be at the heart of the positivity of power. Power produces effects that are neither good, bad nor indifferent. But one could say the same thing about hyphenation — that these are connections that are welded (welded is probably too permanent in a sense), or are articulated at various moments. I think of the way in which Stuart Hall uses articulation — that articulation is the connection of two things that have no necessary belongingness. What I take from those theorists and others which is perhaps in contradistinction to some ways in which cultural studies gets taken up, is that articulation and connection have a historical weight. It is not at the level of individual voluntarism.

That is what was remarkably important about reading Foucault in the early eighties, at a time when the whole push was towards psychologising and individualising various cultural effects. Like so many others at the time, I did not want to give up a level of experience — that is experience at an individual level. I was trying to think about how cultural and social processes as forces individuate us, as opposed to an individual prior to various cultural forms and processes. I think that the notion of the fold is a very apt way of figuring the ways in which individuation takes place through the folding of the social over which we may have no control as individuals. If we took the current situation here, the moves of this present government (Liberal) are folding the social in ways that would have been unthinkable six months ago. It is precisely the positivity of power that means that some of those foldings may backfire in face of the government. In terms of individuation, the technologies of self — or in Teresa de Lauretis' terms, technologies of gender — are precisely those social operations that work us over and produce us as individuated entities, and also as individuals to be governed. One of the clearest expositions of what gender does, is that it hails us as individuals and represents (calls) us as individuals for a social group: woman. Considering questions about individuation and subjectification, as opposed to subjection, gives us the tools to think through what is happening to us; and to think through what has been very powerful for women as individuals formed and fixed as individuals for a class, but also drawn into modes of individuation that differ from the implicitly masculine, white, heterosexual individual. We also need to think about the movement that occurs in and amongst different social categories, and how they are folded and pleated in different ways.

This movement provides a way to analyse how different ethnicities and social groups, for example, can be individuated. At one point in Sexing the Self you discuss the black American writer bell hooks and her work on critical imagination. hook's writing (and others' you mention) produce new forms of imagination (and imaginary spaces) in order to 'break' dominant categories of racialisation and subjectification. That seems crucial in its concreteness — in trying to imagine another space for writing that is outside of 'dominant' notions of subjectivity and experience.
The writings around critical imagination are very inspiring and were spearheaded by women of colour in the United States. That move was very important because they clearly described the concrete locations from where they were imagining, the imagining seen as extraneous to their lives. It is about a pragmatic and necessary day-to-day experience. To think about those processes is also to connect with something that has been at the heart of feminism — the ‘as if’, the future anterior, an idea which has also been taken up by post-modernism. The future anterior is incredibly important at an individual level, but also at a collective level. The notion about a future anterior is that it is not utopic in any sense, but it is about an image, an imagining of a future that has already been re-enfolded in the present. As opposed to distopic writing, utopic (or atopic) types of writing, it refigures the topos or place from which one speaks and thinks. I would say that would be the role of imagination. The ‘as if’ engages with the role of images and imagining that I think are really important and are tied back into that Bergsonian notion of the images as hyphens. That is, the body is an image caught between other images, the body as a hyphenated mass of images and connections. At a methodological level, this then compels scrutiny of the images that recur in the imagining of any community or nation.

III

Nostalgia with a Twist

In Outside Belongings you write about childhood memories and nostalgia with a kind of twist. You talk about the different ways childhood gets constructed as the origin of gay and lesbian identity, and how this gets produced as a nostalgic site of identity. You problematise this nostalgic relation to childhood by investigating a range of literature — from gay and lesbian fiction to the medicalisation of ‘queers’. Through a notion of ‘suspended beginnings’ you write about the need to move away from nostalgia as always a return to the past, and to challenge a ‘teleological’ relationship to childhood, memory and identity. How does this notion of nostalgia create another space for belonging?

Childhood is difficult because for most of us it is remembered with nostalgia but at the same time nostalgia reveals a deep pain. So the point is how to write about childhood in a way that captures it as both an idyllic but impossible moment. It has been through fictional writers like Jeanette Winterson and Michel Tremblay that I was able to truly think about other ways of writing about it. In his novels, Tremblay manages to combine longing, nostalgia, community, family, his own gayness, and gayness of the characters, but he does so in ways that avoid the reactionary pull of nostalgia. So one of the lessons and challenges that childhood poses to contemporary writing is the question of how to use nostalgia without succumbing to a reactionary sense that things were better in the past. This is also central to thinking about forms of community and identity, which are at times driven by nostalgia.

In Australia, in relation to ethnic and Aboriginal peoples, there is always an assumption that they pro-
duce their work in a nostalgic mode. But there is also a kind of dominant nostalgia in relation to cultural others that constructs an imaginary community and nation. Yesterday I was talking to Laleen Jayamanne about Tracey Moffatt’s work and how she reconfigures Aboriginal identities, memories and the past into a kind of future context — for example, a reworking of dominant constructions of Aboriginal women. And how nostalgia can, as you have suggested, actually be a tool, a kind of suspending of an origin — perhaps a reconfiguring of the imaginary point of ‘origin’ of peoples’ identities and memories. That nostalgia can be twisted and turned in order to reconfigure different constructions of self and identities in the present. There is something about this relation, that people do have a sense of nostalgia, but it doesn’t have to mean a tracing back or longing for the past, but rather how they re-work the past (in all of its atrocities and pleasures) in the present.

You have put your finger exactly on what is so important. One cannot discount peoples’ feelings and urges to reconstruct the past in ways that may involve some suspension of actual reality. But it is important that space be there for people, especially for migrants and immigrants. To refer back to the way the ‘as if’ embeds the future in the present in a dynamic way, nostalgia embeds the past in the present — again in a dynamic way. The problem arises when that past becomes solidified and stratified, and then takes on the weight of origin in stories about the family or indeed of the nation. I don’t think that it is inherently wrong to tell stories of national belonging, it is how they get told and in what way; who doesn’t get to tell them and all the rest of it. The way in which Aboriginal peoples’ stories now inhabit an uneasy heart within the present of Australia does give pause for consideration. In some ways the nostalgia on the part of the whites has now been turned inside out, so that they or we can no longer sit placidly as the originator of national tales of belonging.

IV

Teaching from the Outside

I want to shift now to talk about some institutional practices, and this refers back to the issues around feminist, queer, cultural studies we mentioned earlier. With the rise of political conservatism and economic rationalism in Australia at the moment, there have been vast changes and funding cutbacks to the tertiary sector. How can a relatively new and ‘marginalised’ area like feminist, queer cultural studies survive? What are the strategies or tactics we can to employ to survive under the present governmental pressures?

On a daily basis I wonder whether the Centre in which we are sitting will survive. But perhaps because I have never lived in a situation where the government was favourable to intellectual, leftist, progressive causes, I know that things do survive even in harsh political climates. In a way it is to give over too much power to John Howard to construct this present government as the sole determinant of existence. To go back to the image of relations of proximity, at an institutional level I see gender and cultural and women’s studies working as a network. As disciplines we’ve never had
the benefit of autonomy. It may well be that, as Foucault said, you don’t block force, you use its own energy against itself and in other directions. The types of connections and allegiances that women’s studies, cultural studies and feminism have had to forge at an institutional level may serve us well. That network has a long history here which gives me some hope. It is also a challenge to be up to the demands of the present in which we live: political and institutional questions about the role of feminist and cultural theory. These often portray theory, especially feminist theory, as divorced from the ‘real’. But then, taking up the challenge of ‘the real’ means thinking of different ways of engaging and intervening in the social which we inhabit. Ultimately, for me, that is the reason that I do what I do.
By the Roadside
Antigone Kefala

By the Roadside is a journey through foreignness and the practice of writing. I met with Antigone Kefala, poet and writer, to discuss minority writing, and what constitutes a different cultural aesthetics. We talked at her Sydney home in September 1996. We began the conversation, the tape started rolling, I paused to check that we were being recorded — after all, we both exclaimed, we don't want to be talking into a void. Antigone's laughter echoed. It is perhaps the potential void of being rendered 'speechless' that haunts ethnic minority writing in Australia. But maybe it is between the finger that touches the play button and the fingertip of words, the hand that writes and the body of the text, that we can begin to talk about a different cultural aesthetics and politics of writing. But what are the social and political issues at stake? I asked Kefala about her experience of being a writer in Australia, the aesthetic production and cultural processes that influence her travels by the roadside. In these travels, we talked about our different experiences of being Greek in Australia, 'our' generation(s), and the different mediums within which we write.

This conversation fills a space that is punctuated by laughter. Julia Kristeva writes that space causes laughter, Michel Foucault laughs at the stoicness of western thought. Antigone Kefala's laughter resonates throughout this text, as a sort of irony and rhetorical play. The laughter reverberates behind these words. Laughter traverses this space; it breaks open a language about foreignness, and the foreignness of languages, the spaces I asked her about, the space and practice of her writing.¹

I
Foreignness and The Practice of Writing

To a certain extent I feel that every writer — if I can speak of writers in general — is determined by the types of experiences that they have had, by the cultures they have experienced and the different cultural evaluations intrinsic to each culture. So when you are faced with a problem you are not dealing with a tabula rasa, rather you come with enormous baggage. Now, that baggage can remain a static affair if you are not working with it, but at the same time, you have current experiences — current experiences that also work through that past. I am constantly trying to be true (I try and use that expression) to most of my experiences. I am trying to balance past and current experiences to a certain extent. But, as one grows older, certain experiences are no longer of importance, or certain cultural evaluations have already lost their potency. Trying to express all of this is an enormous task. It involves a constant evaluation between what was, what has become, and what is current. To a certain extent my work has been coloured by the past (by my experiences and travels through Romania, Greece and New Zealand), but what I hope is coming through is related to the

present. In general, this experience is something that Australian society has not had. So you are dealing with an outsider’s view. I don’t specifically mind having an outsider’s view. Outsiders are often quite interesting people — but not at all times!

Generally when one comes from the other side and looks at society from the view of someone that was not born into it but has come to it, you will always have an outsider’s view. Whether that gives you critical distance or not I don’t know; it does and it doesn’t. But it definitely gives you another perspective, as you have experienced different forces of life, of society, and of cultural evaluation. These are often quite different from the ones that the society is imposing here. For instance, I write about death; this is a subject that very few writers in Australian society are dealing with. But in the cultures I come from it is a natural element. It is one of the most important forces in our life, and so I am writing about it, but it doesn’t appear to sit well here because it is something that is not done, or should not be done, within an ‘English’ society.

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You were talking about journeying through different cultures. How does living and having to translate between languages structure your relations to writing?

I think that people who speak one language generally have a one-to-one relationship between language and concepts. Someone speaking more languages is always aware of multiple possibilities of linguistically defining the object or the idea. This is a baggage that one carries and which is always present; you may not be expressing it but you are constantly aware of it. And in terms of language it makes one very relative.

You realise that language is a medium which people are constantly re-working, shaping the realities of their present life, history, mythology or their place in the world. All these things are carried by language. You are not dealing with a medium that is in any way neutral. The other issue involved in coming to English from languages which are more grammatically formal, is that you have to learn to express complexities in syntactic terms. English is a more compacted language, with a certain grammatical simplification. It is not a simple language, but you have to re-adjust yourself to the new tonalities, to the intrinsic qualities of the language.

When people are translating some of my work they always ask: ‘is this masculine or feminine?’ or some other grammatical point. The powerful thing in English is that you have a noun or a verb that can be placed syntactically so that it can have a multiplicity of meanings — meanings that, if you try to translate them into more grammatically formal languages, will need to be expressed in two or three different ways in order to translate the possibilities of meaning which English can encompass within one single sentence.

Because my work did not match the idea of what was aesthetically acceptable within
Australian English, I had a period of nearly ten years when nothing was being published. Within ten years of course I grew older, and there were experiences that changed my language, both by an internal process and by the process that I used to cope with the linguistic issues that were on the market. If you look at it in linguistic terms it is a totally different language that I am now writing in. In other languages you can be more lyrical, more flamboyant, and you can express feelings in different ways. In the beginning I used to use a style of language that was infinitely more colourful and surface-charged. Because this type of approach was not acceptable here, I had to become effective in language terms; to find another language that could mediate what I wanted to express to the reader. If you are reading criticisms of my writing you’ll find they still don’t think I am mediating well enough! But my language has become, because of cultural pressures, much more low-key. It is more self-contained — more visual maybe — with a certain silence inside it, or it is trying to encompass a tension which arises intrinsically from coming from other cultural dimensions. I am dealing with a tension in terms of the things conveyed, the attitudes of the things conveyed and the attitude that conveys them. I think this tension or explosiveness is still not acceptable in the current approach to language.

I am interested in the question of the masculine and the feminine in your work, and whether the issue of translation between different languages has something to do with the different subject positions that are ambiguous in your writing. The nuances in your poetry often make the ‘I’ or who is speaking in the text unclear.

I am not sure what you mean by the feminine and the masculine, because I am using a neutral term all the time. This has to do with trying to reach a less personal language but it is not that I am trying to do it less personally — I am trying to define in a broader sense the people I am writing about. So I use ‘you’ a lot in my work. In fact any gender can fit into the language, unless the subject matter is specifically feminine or masculine (as it is in some of my prose writing). It is a universality of issues that I try to encompass. So to a certain extent I don’t want to differentiate and make it, you know, specifically one gender or the other, because in a lot of the experiences one is describing ‘I’ more or less. But I think in my prose I am less generalised because I am often coming from a woman’s point of view.

I find this kind of universality important in your poetry because it portrays some common migrant experiences across different familial and gender relationships.

This is what I am trying to reach unconsciously. For me, the essence of poetry involves a constant paring down of issues, so this will automatically eliminate a lot of inessentials. You are actually going for what could be termed the essence of the issue — if you can reach it of course! Because when you are expressing a totally individual experience, hopefully you manage to reach the essence of it, so then it would be possible to speak to a group of people who have gone through the same experience, and to those who haven’t gone through the same experience. This is what makes poetry come alive.
Your language captures the universality but also the duality or doubteness of experience.

Hopefully. The issue is that you have to find a language that, even though it may express anger, is not angry, or, though it may express unhappiness, is not that unhappy. You have to find something which balances out in the language, in the tonality, so that it can actually survive. But we are definitely operating within a given linguistic context and this implies certain issues that shape one's practice of writing. I think on a day-by-day basis we are dealing so much with factuality. Now factuality has become 'the' element. In previous times, people discussed the issues of the day. People discussed religion or philosophy, or constantly talked about morality or ethical issues. Therefore the vocabulary and the entire approach of the language had to be of a different kind. There was God or some other power, so the language had to match this direction. Now, in the twentieth century, we have a documentary-style approach to language. So to a certain extent the musicality and lyricism of language has gone out of the window. And if anyone is writing something which is different they automatically describe it as difficult, not approachable, and so on! You are dealing with a certain field and it is difficult for me to compare because I am not reading enough in French, Greek and Italian nowadays. But there are definitely big differences in the approaches between languages. And English has a sort of pragmatic feel to it, although it isn’t.

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In terms of writing, language is a sort of containment. When you want to express something from within a language you constantly find that the language itself is a very set system. What one tries to do is write out of the language — beyond the language — or make the language express issues which are not intrinsic to it. As with any type of material, when you are coming to express something you realise that the material itself has its own laws, its own definitions, its own forms — forms that are outside you, that have been shaped by life, environment or culture. You are constantly forced into a combination that you might not like or agree with, or which does not actually express what you want to put across. Then you have to find ways of manoeuvring language or changing it. Yet language is very difficult to change. Even when you are breaking down language, like James Joyce does, language still survives in its form. It doesn’t matter how much you chop and cut away at it, because you have to be intelligible — intelligible to a group of people who are speaking the same language. So all the time you have to, as you do with colour in visual arts or music, find other ways to break through this type of barrier. Language is a colossal instrument. We want to move it in such a way that it can express what we want it to express, but not do it any harm, because one doesn’t want to do any harm to language! For me, this is not just about coming from another language, but is to do with the medium itself. You come to a formed medium that has its own ideas. What you constantly see is how your approach runs away — what happens on the page is not actually what you
intended. You have to work at it in some other manner, as a friendly gesture. I want us to be friends, I don’t want us to be enemies, because after all language is a very powerful medium and we have chosen it as writers.

People can find this medium quite hostile too.

Oh it is, and people are using it in a hostile way. When you come to it from the outside and look at it, it can be very hostile. But I myself never think of language as hostile when I am using it. The attitudes of how one is meant to express things can also be hostile. I find a lack of adventure in the way people are constantly insisting on how language should be used. In general, the assumption is that when you are writing from the ‘outside’ you have not worked at your language long enough, and those sorts of ideas permeate the definitions of ‘writing’. Even though your writing may totally work in terms of what you want to express, people always come back, even in grammatical terms, to correcting your English — because they think that you are incapable of using the language properly. Perhaps this is because everyone wants to be an editor!

How does being on the outside and having constant rejections from dominant institutions — in literary and related areas — shape your perceptions and your reality in a day-to-day sense? How do you maintain a sense of integrity in relation to a writing self?

Well, there are many sides to this issue. I have said elsewhere that when you come into another culture you are constantly reminded on a day-by-day basis, because of an accent or an attitude or whatever, that you are not local. So people immediately ask you how long have you been here, and how do you like the country — when in fact you have lived here more than you have lived anywhere else — three-quarters of your life or so. There is constantly a barrier between you and a natural desire to have some identification with the land, because you constantly feel that you are not allowed to identify. And if you were to identify, people will come up and say ‘and who are you to think that you actually have this type of connection?’ This applies to me because I have already travelled through many cultures and I am always standing by the roadside!

On a day-by-day basis, no-one talks of you directly as a writer in this country. When one is talked about there is often, in most instances, a paragraph about where you have come from and where you have travelled from, that you are a migrant, that your poetry is some translation from Seferis and so on — even though by your actions and writing, you are part of the scene more or less. But this is still not acceptable in literary or critical terms. They would never for instance do this to sports people, and they would never think of sending you to represent Australia. Once I went to represent Australia, but that was because there was an invitation from somewhere else, from someone who knew me. But, in general, you would not make it in terms of a cultural representation of Australia’s literary field. You are dealing with a duality at all times; or a ‘paradox of identification’. So it is difficult to find your place. But I am writing in Australia, so from my definition anyone that writes in Australia, even in other languages, is an Australian writer. But from a culturally dominant
position we are outsiders. What can we do! After all we have all been here for a very long time.

In my case, the mainstay in terms of my writing has been my mother. My writing was very much a focus within my home. My mother was a reader with a very good critical sense. So the kinds of experiences of writing became very much a family scene, without much connection to the outside world. And from time to time some success would come and that would be very nice. But then we would simply go on working the ground in our own terms more or less. Maybe it was a good thing, because to a certain extent when your writing is 'accepted' it imposes changes. That is, within a dominant literary scene they will accept issues which are thought of as the 'right' issues. Now if you intend to continue to be accepted you will have to more or less develop in the direction of what is accepted, and that will define you to a certain extent. You have to make choices between what you feel to be your inner direction, and the direction that is imposed from the outside — as a sign of success or whatever.

*I want to return to the issue about mediation in language. How do you think one can find a 'voice' mediating between languages?*

Difficult to say how one finally finds a voice. I think it is a very slow process and you have to work at it as an ongoing medium. You have to try to be, as far as possible, true to all the issues inside yourself, without trying to sacrifice too much on one side or the other. I think that by living in a society you are automatically shifted by it. I don't think that anyone can survive this type of everyday onslaught without actually becoming part of it. What I find difficult to understand is the lack of acceptability of other points of view, other ways of expressing issues or topics. At the same time everyone has the impression that there are lots of different voices to be heard. People who are on the other side (the dominant) feel that really there are too many voices, while people who are on my side feel that there are too few. I am not sure how that can be worked out. And now, for instance, if one looks at the media, newspapers and television you are dealing with a constant oversimplification in terms of what voices can be heard and which issues are acceptable in being discussed. I think this ongoing oversimplification is imposed by new technologies, or it may be that the technologies are in the hands of people who want to deal with only one single story.

But the point is always that in aesthetic terms everyone has the impression that their definition of aesthetics is a universal one, and that everyone is speaking of exactly the same thing when they are using the same terms — but no-one is actually defining it. That is, no-one is sitting down in any kind of critical sense to say *what is Australian art* or *how do we define it?* I used to say this at the Australia Council when they were constantly asking me to define ethnic art.² I said 'you define Australian art and then I will define ethnic art'. I mean there are wide definitions being written in this country, or there are narrow definitions of what is Australian art. Overall, when I was at the Australia Council is a major funding body for the arts in Australia. Antigone Kefala worked there as an arts administrator.

² The Australia Council is a major funding body for the arts in Australia. Antigone Kefala worked there as an arts administrator.
Council I was constantly trying to speak to people and say it doesn’t really matter what definitions we are using as long as people can work creatively and have access to some support. We will then activate the scene and we might become a ‘normal’ part of it, and then the terms would go away, and people would be considered in terms of their aesthetic work. But I don’t think this has happened. Originally, I was very enthusiastic and hopeful about this. But now with the new attitudes — racism, ideas about political correctness and so on — I don’t know where this leaves us. At the moment, to tell you the truth, I think we are all in retreat. We are staying at home, seeing a few friends, writing a little and sending a few things out.

But what is difficult in any literary field is that there are people considered to be ‘inside’ and those considered to be ‘outside’ the dominant cultural aesthetic. The question for us in terms of ethnicity is that people are not accepted aesthetically, so they are outside aesthetically. People are not discussing our aesthetics, but rather are discussing our nationality. This question stops any sort of discussion about the aesthetics of one group versus the aesthetics of another. When you begin to fight for this element, you are not fighting for an aesthetic definition, or bringing other energies from the margin into the centre or vice versa, but the dominant are looking at you as an ethnic outsider — because there is a belief that there isn’t such a thing as an aesthetic coming from elsewhere. I remember one discussion that we had at the Australia Council. I was trying to discuss how people who paint in other cultures have a different attitude towards colour. The Italians, for instance, have another attitude to colour than the English. We know this because they have been brought up in a different aesthetic field. But no one would accept this, they would say, ‘colour is colour’, so you are dealing with these types of attitudes. It is very difficult to divide these things so that we can discuss aesthetics or we can discuss art within its own terms. But I want to discuss these things, not just in terms of migration, but in terms of an aesthetic migration.

II

Talking About Our Generation(s) — Memories and Foreign Places

We have briefly talked about the complexities and limits of identification in a cultural context. In my context, sometimes I feel caught somewhere between Greek and English languages and cultures. And, through my own medium which is theoretical, finding ways to express experiences and finding modes of identification can be difficult. There aren’t that many around even though there are communities...

It would be more difficult for you because you were born when the idea of a community was already in the air. In our case the community was formed by chance, a group of unknown people migrating together. The communities were invented on the way, as a way of creating a feeling of home, a reinforcement of language and culture, of the past. People were relying on it, and some still do, as a connection to the past, an identity in this vacuum created by migration.
What is interesting in the modes that you write in, is how the past is transformed in the present — how it is both a known and unknown presence in your texts. So, in a broader sense, I wonder how the past might become an unknown element for the migrant. What I am trying to say is, how does the past paradoxically figure as an unknown element for the migrant? I mean, does the past become split from you at some stage? How do you see it?

For me the past is not unknown. At the beginning, you carry more of the past than of the present. You come and view the present constantly through this kind of operative, so to speak, and that is very powerful. This influences the way you analyse, the way you judge, the way you look at how people live, and so on. Then, when you live here and as you experience the place, you change. The past becomes smaller and the present becomes greater. For instance, when we came, Romania was a very powerful and important identity in our lives. My parents had been born there, we were third-generation Greeks in Romania, so the whole experience of the family was based in Romania. Artistic and cultural experiences were shaped very much through this encounter. For instance, the Romanians were very pro-French literature etc. and this became part of our cultural identification. Greece was much more a secondary issue, because we were only there for three years, and it had existed imaginatively in the family as a far away place, and it was something that came through language and so on. So you are dealing with this double issue. Now Romania does not have such a big role in my case (a friend has recently bought me a rough guide to Romania, hoping that I shall go, because I have never been back there!). So the more distant past is probably now coming less and less into the equation… There are now more and more topics influenced by Australia and less by New Zealand for instance. But the experiences in New Zealand were very powerful; it was a time when I was growing up. It was a time when things were very raw still, so a lot my earlier writing reflects this tension and experience. So you have a constant rebalancing of inner forces and the topos that operates at any given moment. You are constantly changing what is inwardly potent in terms of expression, and learning how to redefine yourself in some other terms. This is why the Australian landscape is only starting to come through my writing, because I have only recently begun to travel in Australia, to see the outback. Some of my poetry in Absence has come from these recent trips. I have found the Australian landscape enormously powerful, but I am also very much at home in it, if one can say this of such an immense space. I also found that the nineteenth-century definitions of the land as an enemy, which are constantly being carried forward in the writing, is not what I experienced. It might be a frightening place, because of its immense power, but not an enemy. There are different possibilities to explore in the land now, and I think there needs to be a re-evaluation of our attitudes to it.

There are different sorts of cultural unconsciousness that come through the movement between different languages and cultures. Because I am writing about imagined communities (Greece as my imagined place)
and how you can reinvent them, I think about the power of the imagination and how inhabiting different cultural spaces can produce the imagination. I think the place of the imagined is very, very strong, and tapping into this is one way of being able to rupture a dominant imaginary, and to begin a new type of writing. Your work touches a type of cultural unconscious that permeates everyday identification and relations to a place.

In my case the process would have been a process contrary to yours, that is, trying to imagine the 'here'. For me, my writing has been more or less this — trying to express experiences elsewhere within the present, and to allow the present some form and position, some possibilities and some kind of future. I have gone through so many cultures, there is a resistance in me, so that I may not be as prone to taking on other cultural colourings with great rapidity. I am constantly resisting what is coming, so to speak. But don't forget the dominant is also changing. Australia has changed significantly over the last thirty years, so you are dealing with a society in which a lot of forces are coming to shape it and to change it.

III

Future Writings

Has there been a shift in your writing?

Overall, I don't feel there has been a major shift in my work because the shift is so subtle and so continuous. But what is interesting about looking at finished work after a while is seeing if there are any shifts. Don't forget now that a writer is constantly working with the past more or less, you know, even if it is only yesterday. As you are solving the issues inside, finding some sort of voice and so on, you become less exposed. I mean you are still exposed, but you become less so. I think that when you are young you are much more exposed, because later on you develop some sort of inner possibilities to resist. But when you become older your energies are different, you become less belligerent, maybe attack less. You become more ironic and there are other forces that are coming into play. One begins to see more repetitiousness in the whole thing and that makes for another type of writing.

At the moment I am writing prose. I haven't been writing prose for some time. One piece is called 'Intimacy'; it is about a marriage (a relationship) and is set in Sydney. The second one is set in Greece, a holiday with the family. The third piece is the most difficult; it is called 'Conversations with Mother'. This is a piece about my mother's death, and the period after this. In all three of them I don't think that I am explicitly dealing with cultural dislocation. I've also written a little piece called 'Max' which I am going to give you when you leave; it is about an intellectual cat! Discussing theoretical positions — issues that are, to a certain extent, implicit in my work.
Scent, Sound and Cinema

Trinh T. Minh-ha

*Scent, Sound and Cinema* is about the tracks of passion and the languages of love. How do we experience love, loyalty and betrayal between and within different languages and cultures? How do we translate these experiences? Trinh T. Minh-ha is a writer, film-maker and composer whose recent film, *A Tale of Love*, explores the politics of passion. *A Tale of Love* is partly set in San Francisco in the 1990s and tracks a Vietnamese American woman named Kieu who is writing about the impact of the Vietnamese national poem ‘The Tale of Kieu’ in the Vietnamese communities of the diaspora. It resonates and reverberates the experience of cultural otherness, the multiple layers and relationships to love, language and writing. I talked to Minh-ha about passion, cultural translation and the fidelities of love, and the aesthetics and poetics involved in the production of her writing and film texts.¹

This conversation took place through various encounters and modes of communication. We met in Sydney, talked in Melbourne, linked up via the telephone in Sydney and California in December 1996. The conversation travelled through the static on the phone line and the interrupting sound of telephonic beeps, and the time it took to correspond and rework this conversational piece. In this process, I asked Minh-ha about the politics of interviews: how we create the text as we speak, write and translate through different mediums.

**Prologue — The After-life of a Conversation...**

The interview has a special mystique in the world of documentary making, and I’ve dealt with this at length in some of my film work. What is again at stake in the politics of interviews is the unavoidable question of truth and information. The news media has had a definite influence on the popularised use of the interview, both as a form of oral witnessing and as a privileged access to personalities. Interviewees’ words presented in their immediacy and with their effect of vérité often serve to authenticate the planned message, to lend legitimacy to what remain largely opinions and judgments; or else, to reveal a more private, more direct — if not entirely unmediated — self-image of a public figure (an image in his or her own words).

But most of the time neither the roles of the interviewer and of the recording device, nor the transformative process involved in making the interview accessible, are dealt with integrally. The posture of objectivity is still all-pervasive, and the prevailing media strategy of covering ‘the two sides of the story’ is a good example. Such a strategy is not only naive (suggesting that reality, events and ideas can be captured unmediated and reduced to a question of pros and cons), it also denotes a

politically and creatively weak stance (as it remains unaware of its own formation and politics in its desire to pass for neutral, unbiased information). Although multivocal in its appearance, the final product as a whole lacks a voice of its own, and ultimately what you have is simply a noncommital stance, more preoccupied with correct formulas than with social inquiry. The politics of the interviewer are not absent here. They are quite evident in the way the mesh of questions and answers is constituted; but this is usually not engaged with, and hence the work remains caught in the binary machine that governs the programming of information in the media.

This is not to say that the art of staging an interview or of participating in a ‘public dialogue’ is not important. There are many ways to break away from the mass communication mould. I myself have structured the book Framed, of film scripts and a number of interviews on my work, which probably accounts for this more recent tendency among interviewers to open our conversation with a question on the interview itself. Some have, for example, voiced their concern about its legitimising function in the interpretation of the work at issue. And, of course, it is a well-justified concern because the interview’s effect is by nature totally fabricated, and the interviewee is conventionally either a typical layperson, an expert, or else a celebrity. But again, much of how one enters and engages in a conversation, of how an interview unfolds and is received, also depends on the kind of space opened up, and on the interviewers’ attitude, the way they situate themselves in the event they’ve initiated.

With the best intentions, interviewers sometimes get caught in their own framing, being too eager to proceed with their list of preformed questions, regardless of what the answers given are and where these are heading. In other words, they rarely commit themselves in their questions, which are often based on answers they have already assumed ahead of time. Hence they are more anxious to carry out the task as planned than to engage in the conversation itself. In the end — even though the voice of knowledge may be deferred to the interviewee, and unless one remains inventive and exerts one’s skill to make detours so as not to get caught in mere ‘answering’ — as interviewee one can only speak within a preconceived role and a forced itinerary. Self-explanation and self-image each have their own problem, and it’s a problem of translation. As I’ve suggested in my film Reassemblage, the space opened up should not be that of speaking ‘about’, but rather of speaking ‘with’ or ‘nearby’. How can one speak of oneself and one’s work in the plural? How can the interview remain a site of multiplicities?

Here I would come back to a definition of the inter-view that stands out more clearly in the French terms entrevue and entretien: entrevue is from the verb(s’) entrevoir, to see one another, to meet; and entretien is from the verb entretener, to maintain, prolong, or cultivate. Most relevant is the sense of mutuality and betweenness — entre or inter — and the sense of sight and touch — voir (vue) and tenir (tiens), to see and to hold. In the use of entrevoir and entrevue, what is often implied is an inkling of something imprecise, partially or suddenly perceived, a sounding of something to be discovered, a foresight, a view forward. While in the use of entretener and entretien, what is connoted is the idea
of holding together, of nourishing, of maintaining someone in an affective state. When this term is applied, for example, to a woman (une femme entretenue) — usually a lover or a prostitute — it refers to a liaison, a relationship that is kept living through both emotional and financial support. These are just a few examples of the range of possibilities of meaning that define the interview and can act on it creatively. We have here a situation in which something happens that is at the same time a seeing and a holding, a sighting and a sounding, a feel or a view between and forward. Further, this encounter with different thoughts, discourses and events yields what one can call a 'third ground' — one on which something comes to pass between the two of us which is not necessarily something that passed between the interviewer and the interviewee. It's a relationship, let's say, between energies, between languages, or between words, concepts, and concerns.

In this sense, the reading of one's work, or more precisely, my reading of my work, has never been that of a single individual. It does not exist before the making, hence it's not determined only by my intentions. It's built with both the unpredicted interactions of the different elements in the work among themselves and from the many readings and the feedback that viewers have advanced in response to the work. Such a reading is always densely populated by other people's readings, and yet it constitutes a voice of its own because everything holds together with precision when one works with resonance, rather than seeks to settle meaning. The notion of translation that interests you is quite relevant here, because through interviews a form of autotranslation is generated, a spectral relationship to the work takes on a life of its own, which while 'failing' to do what the 'original' does, contributes to the life-as-afterlife of this work.

Just as people read a translated work because they cannot read the original, or they read both original and translation for further insight, they may come to a work first through reading an interview or they may read interviews so as to get a different flavour of the work. It's not only a question of accessibility and interlinearity that is involved here, but also of the life-afterlife cycles that allow a work to travel and live on. The interview has its own place and that's why I guess complex thinkers of our time like Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, Virilio, Barthes, Cixous, Lisspector and Kristeva all have their interviews published in book form. It is by the translation that their texts literally survive and are kept in circulation.

The issue of translation is crucial because it is a move from the oral to the written word. So there is a whole network of different conceptions of language, because as you write, as you transcribe and edit you are changing the language. When you read an interview it is highly edited and transformed, and I think that side of it gets lost in terms of the reader. In the sense that an interview is worked over (even though it is meant to capture a 'moment' between two or three people), so there is a way in which it is transformed, its original modality alters and it circulates in a different way — to a different audience. Maybe that's what you mean by an afterlife...

What you have just mentioned here — the process of transforming a text, the passage from
what is heard to what is read, or else, the realisation of something that lies between the spoken and the written sign - offers many possibilities when one takes into full consideration the condition and nature of a published conversation. Why, for example, the need to record the event? Why the printed word rather than the audiotaped word? When the term translation is used in its [Walter] Benjaminian ‘afterlife’ sense, not in the distinction he made between translation and poetry but in the way he radicalises its impossible relation to the original, one can talk about many forms of translation that are not only relations between one language and another. The relations between linguistic, extra-linguistic and non-linguistic events are infinite and each generates a set of problems of their own as one reality passes into another — ‘lived reality’ as distinct from film, dance, or writing reality for example. So, if the transformation necessitated by the published interview is another form of translation, a mode simply different from the original mode, then the loss you imply is no mere loss.

It’s an art of losing without losing. The difficulty is to keep this edge in the trans-formative process. One cannot, for example, merely point a video camera at a passionate strike and expect the footage obtained to provide the viewers with anything but an impoverished, if not entirely boring experience of the live event. One can only avoid this by working precisely on the translation of this event into the video medium — that is, on what video can specifically offer that allows one to grasp the event differently while recreating it in its full intensity and multisensorial dimension. The same applies to the processes involved in the published interview. If video is commonly used as a mere recording device, interviews are often considered to be a means for the mere retrieval of interviewees’ spontaneous words. There is still a widespread tendency to sanctify spontaneity, and media publications abound with this type of interview, that are fine to listen to but do not have much to offer to the reader.

What cannot be taken for granted is the acute difference between speech and the printed text. If you lose the subtlety of body intercommunication and the rich fabric of audiovisual inflection of the live conversation, which the transcribed text misses or cannot retrieve, then what do you offer the reader in its place? Words used to appeal to a listener differ in their impact from those used to sustain the interest of a reader. What appears irritatingly useless, flat, repetitive, redundant or ridiculous when written down, has a very definite function when spoken aloud. Roland Barthes wrote lucidly on these ‘scraps of language’ and on the trap of scription. But, as with Benjamin’s translation, if the transcribed text loses in relation to the live event, it also makes the original lose its ‘sacred’ character by making the transcriber and editor aware of its ‘inaccuracies’ (the forced coherence, the quick assumption, the unintelligible reply, the non-articulated argument, the misstatement, the disjunction, the mending, the posing, in brief, the conventionality of Old Spontaneous Me, which I’ve questioned in Woman, Native, Other). As we’ve seen, an interview involves the sighting and sounding of something imprecise to be discovered. A ‘bad’ translation is then one that remains oblivious to the necessary becoming of the text, to this third ground, where what comes through asserts itself as nei-
ther speech nor writing.

For me, one of the most challenging aspects in the passage from word (spoken) to word (written) or from image to word has to do with what I call a certain 'residue.' When you deal with translation and the critical relation between realities, you are always caught in a gesture that is at once blind and lucid: on one level you can all too clearly show or communicate through the power of the image and the word; on another, you realise acutely that, in showing, you actually cover what you try with infinite skill and care to lay hold of. The word only serves to block out another reality, while the image, even and especially with its photographic authority, constantly veils in exposing. No matter how much you want to give away, something 'sits back' and remains, that may not be seen but is not necessarily invisible. It's impossible to put this residue into a form of direct communication, and the power of the image and of the word is not simply to be located in what is visible or invisible, intelligible or unintelligible. I've always had to work with this predicament in my films, but it is in the last one, *A Tale of Love*, that such a predicament becomes more manifestly a salient feature of the film.

I

**Love, Loyalty, Betrayal**

*A Tale of Love*, your most recent film, is about a kind of translation, although it is not necessarily just about this. But, nonetheless, it has various modes of transformation and translation in relation to the story. How does the notion of residue and image, the different elements and components that make up the story, emerge in the film?

I am reminded here of the distinction the late film critic Serge Daney made between the visual and the image. Here, the visual refers to seeing what is given as legible, so that one can talk about the visual of a newspaper, for example, even when there are no photos in it. Whereas the image refers to an experience of vision that inherently involves alterity (or otherness). Everything is overwhelmingly visual around us today, and, as Daney suggested, we're heading toward societies that know more and more how to read (to decipher or to decode), but less and less how to see. He used such a distinction to offer, among others, a complex political analysis of the media's Gulf War, but one can say more generally that working with and on the image has become more and more rare. I find this work more likely to survive in films from Eastern Europe, Japan, the Middle East, or certain other parts of the Third World than I find it in the States, for example.

It's difficult to work in the realm of the image when the widespread mode of production and reception only knows the visual. My experience with a good number of programmers', viewers' and reviewers' reactions to *A Tale of Love* is very telling in this respect. A 'critical' or more truthful treatment of love requires that one deal with its banalities and clichés, displacing them rather than hiding or glossing over them. But what tends to go unseen is that which can radically not be said or shown
directly: the built-in capacity of certain images to become other than what they seem to be, the context and alter-text that come with the very legible use, in *A Tale of Love*, of certain typical details and events in the film. In other words, the common tendency is to see in exclusive terms — original or copy, loyalty or betrayal — but not in both at the same time. So that to be ‘critical’ often means to point out, from a safe place, what is wrong in the state of things. Whereas for me, it means mainly to work with freedom. The gesture of pointing outward carries with it that of pointing inward, to oneself, and vice-versa, and hence there’s no safe place from which to voice criticism.

The image always runs the risk of being reduced to the visual in the reception of critical work. Many viewers have had problems, for example, with what they read as ‘typical’, ‘familiar’, ‘too explicit’, ‘so recognisable’, ‘something we already know...’, which some locate in the visuals of *A Tale of Love*, and others in its specific dialogues or verbal events. Still other viewers — perhaps we should call them ‘seers’ — immediately see what in the images here is given and yet does not give itself up to sight. They immediately take in the images’ self-other dimension and have managed to verbalise with great subtlety and accuracy what comes with, but is not given as legible in them. Of course, the difficulty with a film categorised as ‘narrative feature’ is that mass-media-trained viewers come to it expecting storyline, action, dialogues and actors — areas with which I have worked quite critically. What often goes unseen by these viewers is the multiplicity of languages within the film — such as the languages of lighting, of setting, of colour, of music, of movement (not only the camera movement or the movement between images created in editing, but also the movement within the image). These non-verbal components of the image strongly affect viewers, whether they recognise them or not, but what continues conventionally to dominate their viewing/reading of the film are its all-too-legible elements. Obviously, for these viewers, my films have, at least at first sight and hearing, very little to offer.

Since things constantly shift in the realm of the image, where fidelity of representation and of meaning have only a limited role, it is necessary that the relationship between what is seen and what is heard not be made uniform in my films. Although tightly woven in the fabric of the film, the verbal texts are treated as only one among many other events; or, let’s say, as an action, a character, a performance of its own. They have a precise role, but they are not central to the making of meaning, nor are they used to consolidate meaning. On the contrary, by their sparseness (as in my early films) or excess (as in the last three films) they often serve to undermine meaning and to bring about a state of non-sense or of over-sense where contraries mate. Likewise, the image ‘shows’ rather than directs, decorates (as with stereotypes and clichés), or illustrates a message. There is a lot to absorb and nothing to decipher in the images of *A Tale of Love*, for these don’t function to advance any plot nor are they subject to a central story. Usually ‘image-seers’ are not only highly responsive to the plastic-musical dimension of this film, they’re also sensitive to the tight interactions of its verbal with its non-verbal components.
I want to pick up on the notion of performance here, the different languages and components that make up the film. There is a line in the film that says, ‘narrative is a track of scents passed on from lovers to lovers’ and that is very interesting in terms of storytelling and modes of narrative; that stories do have these other elements, sensuous components — like a language of the body, a language of rhythm, a language of passion. I think these elements often escape the ways in which we understand narrative — but also how we understand love to a certain extent.

I work mainly in terms of resonance. This whole preoccupation with the sense of smell in *A Tale of Love*, which is quasi-impossible to render in film, is certainly related to the notion of residue and resonance. What interests me is not the love story — which I differentiate from the story of love — but the state of being in love: a state in which our perception of the world around us radically changes. Love can awaken our senses in an intense and unpredicted manner. It can open the door to an other world never experienced before, while literally blinding us to the familiar world of reason, of common logic and of everyday practicalities. The spell of a lover’s fragrance, the smell of certain places, certain cities, certain things related to the beloved, is so powerful that it can induce a state of trance and of madness quite in comprehensible to those who are not in love. When a forgotten scent hits you, you never know where it leads you, what it will do to you; and as a character in the film said, ‘by the time you realise it, it’s too late. You’re hurled into the dark corridors of buried memories. And you walked around crazed, feeling like a murderer again.’ Each scent unfolds with it a whole narrative track whose details, emerging wildly, in an apparently random way, allow the narrative to take shape effortlessly. The sense of smell is continually said to be the sense of memory and of imagination.

Odour can attract or repulse just as a story of this kind can spellbind or repel, depending on the state in which one is when one receives it, or more specifically here, on whether the eye/ear looking at the image is one in love, one that sees/hears beyond the screen of the legible. It is through odours that one intimately takes in or rejects the Other, and smell, like residue, resists direct (verbal) communication. Commonly associated with mud and refuse, residue connotes something of no value and no use, to be discarded. But, as mentioned, residue also means deposit, sediment, something that persists in remaining behind. In our modern societies where odours are repressed and everything is deodorised, it is hardly surprising that the sense of smell is devalued and regarded as inferior because it is supposedly subordinated to the emotions. The line you quote was inspired by the poet and ecologist Gary Snyder who wrote, ‘narrative in the deer world is a track of scents that is passed on from deer to deer’. This reminds me of a comment by a Chilean economist when he saw my film *Reassembly*. Describing the movement of discovery and the unexpected, fleeting character of the images, he said ‘It’s looking like a deer. I feel like a deer looking around’. I’ve had many similar comments from viewers about the ephemeral quality of this film and the freshness of its looks, but his comment is striking in its imagery. For me, what is condensed in this image given in response
to other images is the animal sense of sight, sound and smell all together.

The becoming-animal is both regressive and progressive. Smell can betray us, but it is also our most faithful detecting ability. With the devaluation comes the rehabilitation of the 'lower senses' (touch, taste and smell) in the production of knowledge. While Freud links the repression of smell to man's break with the animal in the civilising process, Nietzsche vindictively declares: 'All my genius is in my nostrils'. In addition to the definite role the olfactory continues to play in social (race, class, gender, age) discrimination, there is also a long aesthetic and spiritual tradition associated with it. It is worth mentioning here the controversial reactions I've got from viewers across genders to the sections dealing with perfumes in *A Tale of Love*. Some said the verbal treatment of smell is what works best for them from the script; others were particularly enraptured by the visual setting of the perfume sequences; others viscerally hated this very part in the film, a reaction they attributed either to the text or to the actors' performance. There is a general tendency among the latter to scorn the relation between the female and the sense of smell or between women and intuitive knowledge, which is understandable. But as I mentioned earlier in relation to love, it's not a question here of censoring, hiding, or excluding in order to present a correct image of women in love. I find it more important to work with clichés to unsettle clichés.

While writing the script of *A Tale of Love*, I deliberately went into women's magazines to learn the rhetoric of perfumes; not only because Juliet, the character in the film who loves through smell, is editor of a women's magazine, but also because fragrance is the area of creativity in which women have excelled. In my reading of the nineteenth-century poem, 'The Tale of Kieu', from which the film takes its inspiration, the olfactory world consistently merges with the musical world. It is with the link I make between the creation of perfumes and that of love narratives, or more generally, between the creations of sound, scent and image that today's commercial rhetoric of perfumes is both displayed and displaced in the film. The power of smell to move us beyond the rational is the power resorted to in spiritual contexts to purify the senses. For example, it is common practice to use perfumes and incense during prayers. Chinese and Japanese incense connoisseurs have a perfect expression for their subtle activity: they do not smell, but rather 'listen to incense'. In their curative, creative and spiritual powers, both sound and scent can facilitate access to altered states of consciousness and the passage from the material to the immaterial. Each fragrance has specific resonances, and the ability to 'scent out' is the ability to resonate with scents. In saying narrative is a track of scents emitted and transmitted from lover to lover, what is involved is not only the passion — since passion here is first and foremost an effect of cinema, which may reveal itself everywhere without showing itself in one specific location — but also the performance-as-performance of passion, its mise-en-scène, its condensation and vaporisation, which constitute the politics and aesthetic of the film.

Scent, sound and cinema are all experiences of transience. No matter how strong and persis-
scent their impact can be, fragrances are volatile, and sounds do not last. Paul Virilio spoke of cinema and its universe of light-in-motion in the terms of an aesthetic of disappearance. With this peculiar link between sight, sound and scent, we are here very far from the confines of emotions commonly conveyed by the relation between woman, animal and the sense of smell. So no matter how silly, banal and stereotypical one’s love relationship can be, the person one loves always remains unique, and being in love always offers the potential to open oneself up to new realms of consciousness. Benjamin wrote about translation as aiming for that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the original work. Critical film work calls for critical reading, which requires that viewers activate the film the way performers play a musical score. For Barthes, the reduction of reading to a consumption, and the inability to set the text going, in collaboration with the writer or maker, account for the ‘boredom’ that many experience in the face of the modern text or of the experimental film. This is where love comes in again, as I’ve suggested earlier. If one is available to love, one has this capacity to activate things, and one is open to the translatability of the film — a feature inherent in certain works, in their radical ability to yield a multiplicity of readings.

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The love relation that you are signalling between the text and the reader also links to issues about how you ‘love’; as you have said elsewhere, you do have to love ‘the object of your study’. And what is important in the film is that it has various love relations running through it. It is about a Vietnamese-American woman, her experience of exile, and her rewriting of a tale of love, ‘The Tale of Kieu’, but it also locates the fraughtness of love. I am thinking about this love relation in terms of cultural analysis and feminist theory — where the kind of love relation to others, to cultural others, sometimes signals there isn’t a relationship in a way. That is, the relationship between feminist theory and the ability to activate or understand other types of love if you like, or other people’s modes of being in the world.

I think of myself and my work as a continuum in which everything is linked and in constant motion. Certain links are more articulated than others because I’ve thought about them more or I have encountered them more often in audiences’ responses. Other links are less evident; they remain in the background, non-talked about. They emerge by accident in the processes of thinking with the work, or when a viewer accurately hits on certain chords and releases them from their unnamed status. This is what I also mean by resonance. A work begins, for example, with a throw of the dice. I would take up the element of chance and dwell on the configuration of the dice until their inherent relations rise to visibility and reveal to me something of our encounter. Listening to how things resonate among themselves has led me into totally unforeseen areas. This is where my work markedly differs, for example, from the work of Chris Marker, whom people often evoke together with Ivens, Kubelka, Godard and (Johan van der) Keuken when commenting on my films. The voice of Marker’s
films (rather than his installations) is mainly that of a decipherment; a subjectivity is here centralised and the speaking subject is a masterful decoder, whether this subject expresses itself in the first or the third person pronoun, whether indirectly via a fictional character or via a female interlocutor.

It’s difficult to pin down the way resonance works without being immediately reductive. But let’s say in A Tale of Love, the directions love can take and the threads woven with it are indefinite. Kieu, the Vietnamese-American protagonist of the film, is doing research and writing on the after-life impact of ‘The Tale of Kieu’ in the Vietnamese diaspora. As you see, she and the Vietnamese protagonist who personifies love in the poem² have the same name. This is something I obviously play on in the film. For, in love, loyalty and betrayal painfully come together. One can say the same of translation. Conventionally, loyalty has always been in conflict with freedom. To be loyal is to strive for likeness in the reproduction of meaning, while translation also requires that one frees oneself from the all-importance of meaning to bring about the spirit of the original, as Benjamin said, or to let one’s language be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. I would have had to make a film of six to twelve two-hour episodes to illustrate faithfully ‘The Tale of Kieu’, as most viewers from the Vietnamese communities expect. But instead I offer them an open ‘haiku’ of the Tale, and ‘betray’ what they want to see in the visual rendering of the poem. By simply conceiving ‘Kieu’ not as a name belonging to an individual, not as a character in a story, but as a situated multiplicity, a mirror that reflects other mirrors, I have broken loose from the dualistic relation between translator and originator. One can say that, placed in the context of the film’s treatment of voyeurism, the work of translation turns out to be the work of a crowd, for it involves all active participants — makers, actors, viewers, tools of creation. This takes on a complex dimension, and the links at work can’t all be foreseen, since resonances are infinite. As I proceeded with the film, it was the material-in-progress and love as a multiplicity that worked on me, not the contrary.

One of the links that remains constant throughout the film is certainly that with feminism. As you know, in the late sixties and in the seventies, the second-wave feminists produced a large body of work critical of love. It was the time when the rhetoric of the ‘sexual revolution’ left women in a double bind as to whether they should seek approval in being ‘a groovy chick’ and lose their individuality in the apparatus of sex privatisation, or be called names and give up love as their expression of liberty. Shulamith Firestone, for example, wrote at length on this ‘political of love’ and its unequal power context. She carried on arguments advanced some twenty years earlier by De Beauvoir, reintroducing logic in the bedroom, because, as she sustained in her work, women and love are underpinnings; if one starts looking too closely at them, one threatens the very structure of culture. In a

² As Trinh writes elsewhere, the film is loosely inspired by ‘The Tale of Kieu’, the Vietnamese national poem of love, written in the early 19th century (Kieu’s story was told in 3,254 verses — the poetry and rhythms were drawn from the songs and proverbs of folk tradition). The poem tells of the misfortunes of Kieu, a martyred woman who sacrificed her ‘purity’ and prostituted herself for the good of the family Vietnamese people (both in Vietnam and in diaspora) see the poem as a mythical biography of the ‘motherland’, marked by internal turbulence and foreign domination.
situation of profound devotion and mutual emotional vulnerability, one is easily caught in this pathetic delirium where 'she is he', and, as De Beauvoir concisely put it, 'It was to find herself, to save herself, that she lost herself in him... for her the whole of reality is in the other'. But that feminists have questioned women's victimisation and self-victimisation in love does not mean they are blind to forms of love other than sexual love or romantic love. Both Firestone's and De Beauvoir's general definitions of love in their analyses of power inequality have attested to this.

So, it's very difficult today to make a film on love without bearing in mind what feminists have over the years revealed to be the pivot of women's oppression, the place of women's exploitation and uncritical identification with emotion and sex appeal. Even if you are not a feminist it's still difficult, because in these post-sexual-revolution times, it's hard not to be blasé about love in its expression and representation. Love is said to be 'liquid'; anything goes here, because of its die-hard, all-sentimental connotation. One of the familiar pieces of advice given to young poets by their mentors — and here Rainer Maria Rilke comes to mind — is to avoid writing love poems. Love poems, like love stories, are the most difficult to write because it takes maturity to give something of yourself without falling prey to facile forms. That's partly why, in A Tale of Love, instead of going directly at it and killing it; or instead of aiming for a 'unique', 'unheard of', 'exceptional-individual' love story, I'd rather work with subtle differences in the play of the common with the uncommon, or better, in the dynamics between the overseen, the unseen and, for some, the ultrasen. Being open to translatability from its inception, the film — which comes together in an unachieved way — invites unachieved readings and readings. These have their own blind spots and sharp edges that remain indefinite, all depending on how each viewer engages in a work with multiple entries and exits. We return here to the notion of multiplicity — which for me is clearly related to the notions of difference and resonance. One can also say that multiplicity is at the heart of both the feminist struggle and the struggle of people of colour.

This notion of resonance and multiplicity is interesting in terms of people of colour and migrants. For me, one of the things that resonates this multiplicity in A Tale of Love is the generational issues Kieu experiences. Kieu is researching and rewriting 'The Tale of Kieu', but she also has to negotiate different sorts of love relationships (with her aunt, her friends, her photographer). This raises important questions for children of migrants whose experiences of love and loyalty are quite complicated. I think (from my own writing and experience) there is a way in which you live between two (or three) languages and cultures, and trying to make meaning out of that involves the constant negotiation between past and present lives and cultures. This produces various forms of love, loyalty and betrayal across and between different cultures and generations. It produces interesting affects (I take affect to mean feelings or emotions) — the multiple emotions that are experienced, like love and hate, pleasure and pain, anger, loss and betrayal...

Talking about generational issues, there's more recently been something like a new wave of works focusing on love by mature women. June Jordan in poetry; Valie Export, Yvonne Rainer, Mira
Nair in film; Julia Kristeva, Teresa de Lauretis, Kaja Silverman in theory; and the list goes on, not to mention others like Clarice Lispector, Marguerite Duras, Hélène Cixous or Assia Djebar for whom love (and death) has always been at the core of writing. In a different gamut of colour markers, Love has returned, and with it the question of loyalty and freedom. This may be very telling about our times, which are those of the migrant self, of mass refugeeism and of forced immigration. Loyalty is commonly thought of as a form of constraint but, as I’ve mentioned, loyalty and betrayal go together, even though ethically one can be quite negative, the other quite positive. In order to be loyal one has to betray in certain ways, and in order be free one can only be loyal, not the contrary.

The question of freedom would definitely arise if I were to compare my last film to my previous films. The film world tends to see them in terms of documentary and narrative. I see them more as different attitudes towards freedom. Working with largely ‘non-staged’ material led me to conceiving freedom mainly in terms of instant alertness, and of unpremeditated, unhearsed gestures which, when pushed to the limits, are able to inscribe the hesitations, the lapses, the blank spaces, the white flares, the in-betweens of events. Whereas working on A Tale of Love required a very different way of conceiving freedom. We are dealing here with a scripted itinerary in which every element of the film has been so very carefully thought through that even the notion of ‘beauty’ is contextualised. The tendency is no longer to ‘go natural,’ but to fully work with beauty in its artifices and rituals (non-naturalistic and non-psychological writing, setting, lighting, acting, editing, camera movement, score composition). This is so as to make of the meticulous filmic arrangement a ‘ceremony’ of love. A critic called A Tale of Love ‘a sensual bombardment’ — a very adequate comment, and yet the film is also made to work on more than one level. In the way the film comes together, the relation between each independent element and the whole is never stabilised, for what is involved is not one but a multiplicity of centres. It can be odd to experience a rigorously built structure whose rigour does not serve any single interest or central purpose. Because of the different ways in which we understand freedom, viewers’ first reactions to the film tend to be wildly contradictory. Quite a few viewers coming out from the screening of the film exclaimed ‘What a freedom!’ while others asked ‘What’s experimental about it?’ or more relevantly to our inquiry about loyalty and betrayal, ‘Why this film? Why can’t she just go on doing what she’s so good at?’

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I was recently re-reading Woman, Native, Other. I read it very closely and the language produced a kind of rhythm for me. This was an intense experience. It was creating what I would call a revolutionary mode of language. I experienced a freedom and loyalty (freedom not in the liberal sense of the word) and betrayal and deception in the writing and my relationship to it. You have talked about your writing elsewhere, but what is the relation of loyalty and betrayal to the passion of writing and your passion in writing.
The notions of rhythm and of foreignness are relevant to both writing and film-making even though the realms of activities involved are very different. I don’t quite know yet how I’m going to make the link between rhythm and loyalty and betrayal in writing, but your reintroduction of freedom and passion here may help. I have tried many times elsewhere to articulate this notion of rhythm in my work, but I don’t think I’ve even come close to conveying its importance and complexities in our lives and aesthetic experience. I’ll give it another try here. Rhythm relegated to the realms of music and poetry is often thought of as a mere arty device, bound to notions of metre, measure, pattern and symmetry; while the sense of rhythm is either reduced to a technical musical ability or mystified as a godsend, that is, a gift one is either naturally endowed with or not at all. For me, such a narrow understanding of rhythm is indicative of the degree to which we revel in ignorance when it comes to non-verbal communication. I would say that rhythm is what basically determines the ‘quality’ of social relationships and of artistic manifestations. What makes a work ‘inspiring’ is not the idea, the vision, the information, the insight, or the craft per se. It is how all these unexpectedly click in, come apart, meet halfway, and so on; in other words, how they do and undo one another in their diversified movements, forming a strong assemblage of No Thing, rather than of nothing. This is rhythm.

The description you gave of your aesthetic experience (by which I mean a mode of perception) in reading Woman, Native, Other touches very keenly on another basic aspect of what rhythm can do. Rhythm finds resonance in our whole organism; it cannot be consigned to the ear, the hand, the foot or even the eye. Its experience is an experience of both the mind and the body. Its stimulating effect excites one to action; it arouses one’s ability to connect, proliferate, and enrich; and it takes one continuously from one association to another. In that sense, rhythm invites the reader’s or viewer’s collaboration with the writer or film-maker in bringing about the full resonance of the work. I’ve often heard from both my enthusiastic and recalcitrant audiences/readers about the recurrent aftermath effects of my works, whose images keep on coming back vividly and with precision, marking them deeply, or staying on with them for weeks, as in the case of the films. For me, this is clearly the work of rhythm. The way one marks the social or artistic moment makes all the difference. One is invited through rhythm to perceive by grouping (impressions and intervals) with precision in time, tonality and intensity; or else, to expand one’s attention so as to grasp or to handle a vast amount of materials while engaging in the trajectory of a work.

Rhythm helps both to focus and to disperse without the fear of losing one or the other. But for me, whether something works or not in my films and books would also largely depend on the effortlessness of the rhythm. The grouping, spreading and stressing of relations and intervals have to take shape quite effortlessly; that is, they need not be conspicuous or entirely conscious. I’m not talking here about the fluidity of ‘phrasing’, of interrupting and of assembling; in other words, about the work of editing while creating. Also, I’m not talking about the specific rhythm created with the
movements between and within the images, or between image and sound, for example. All these form the more visible part of an extensive praxis of rhythm. I'm implying an indefinite amount of possible relationships that happen on many levels at once. Rather than having one centralised or hierarchised relationship to which everything else is subordinated, we have here a net of relationships, whose intensities are accented with precision and subtlety mainly to invite other markings and unmarkings. The ability to achieve this effortlessly comes with the love and passion that one has for the 'raw' material, the matrix from which things come together or apart, take shape and dissolve largely on their own accord.

Ultimately, what comes first and foremost with the sense of rhythm is the feeling of freedom. With rhythm, one is free of metre and steady measure; free to play with a recurrent beat, to miss it, or to fill in the gap with one's own beat; free to follow, to leave off or to meander along a trajectory; and free to take in the periodicity of a process in countless different ways. Loyalty to a marking and betrayal of this very marking are both necessary, artistically as well as culturally and politically speaking. Rhythm as a determinant of the intricacy and beauty of relationships leads us back to love and passion, with its loyalties and dis-loyalties. You have chosen to focus on the passion in writing and the relationship between writer and writing. Freedom here would also refer to the difference between and within; to the element of foreignness; or to the third ground mentioned earlier. Again, is the encounter between interviewer and interviewee an encounter of languages? of cultures? of rhythms? Fidelity to one's vocation means that somewhere along the line, at one moment or another, one is bound to break with many conformities. For Maurice Blanchot, the essence of infidelity lies in its 'unlimited power of dispersion'. It was in the terms of a fidelity to this power and an infidelity to herself that he linked Virginia Woolf's insecurity and agony as a writer to her talent, her passions and her chosen death.

Passion can be a driving force for writing; but in writing, passion, with its illogical blindness and lucidity, becomes legible and intelligible. I've already written at length on the difficult relation of woman to language, that is to a social contract, when, for her, to align a trace on the page is to recognise the trace of His traces. To be a writer and a feminist (among other things) is to assume one's marginality and to become a foreigner to one's own language, community, and identity. Writing, as Kristeva has affirmed, 'is impossible without some kind of exile'. This is why, for me, to make a film on love is no doubt to betray (one's) love. One can only fulfill the task by stubbornly turning around Love, looking as a foreigner at its surfaces, and refusing, as I wrote in Woman, Native, Other, to perorate meaning — an act as crippled as that of ripping open the mother's womb to verify the sex of an unborn child. A Tale of Love has no use for psychological realism or for perspective and depth of field. Its images are insistently frontal and 'realistically' two-dimensional; and the actors are not so much characters as they are signs, bodies, voices; in short, multiplicities. The illusion of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional medium being rejected, what is finally projected on the screen is unequivo-
ocally the *surfaces* of passion.

I feel great affinity with Marguerite Duras’ remark that after the premiere of her film *India Song* she had the impression of being dispossessed, not only of a given area, a place, her habitat, but even of her identity. In making the film she realised she had killed Anne-Marie Stretter, the protagonist of her film and book. Stretter was also the woman whom she had known from her time in Vietnam and whose power of death had obsessed her to the point that it was what kept her writing moving until the release of *India Song*. She had to kill Stretter for the film to materialise; it was her utmost gift to this film, whose story is also that of a *dead* woman. Both betrayal and loyalty are here poignantly at work. The question of dispossession and of foreignness leads me back to your question on migrants and immigrants, which is an area also dealt with in *A Tale of Love*, as you’ve pointed out. It is through the politics of denationalising the refugee and the emigré that a person-who-leaves becomes normalised, being systematically compelled to undergo the process of giving up their home, their country, their language, their identity, their proper name. In order to be accepted, one has to abandon one’s unwanted self. In order to belong anew, one has to take the oath of loyalty, which entails disloyalty to one’s home nation and identity. Hardly have the newcomers reached the host territory before they’re made to experience the mutilation of their name which, if not entirely changed, can only survive in fragments — shortened, mispelled, mispronounced, or replaced by an equivalent. In this denationalisation of the foreigner we can better grasp the complexity of loyalty and betrayal in relation to love, to freedom, to one’s own subjectivity...

*This is what interests me, the ways in which one’s subjectivity moves through different layers of love, loyalty and betrayal; and that you can’t always reconcile these relations, because you are forced into a false sense of loyalty and fidelity when you enter into another language, nation, culture...*

Even if you stay in the same place all your life and speak the same language, you cannot avoid the processes of change. The importance of a language’s growth and renewal has been a well-debated issue in translation. Words take on a new life, expand, shift, suspend, become trite, decline and die within a language. But perhaps such a maturing process becomes all the more destabilising when it intermingles with processes of hybridisation and of deterritorialisation, as in the case of migrants, marginals and women. To unsettle what tends to be naturalised, to return to emotion without simply reviving the old discourse of passion and love, or to write differently, one needs to fare — whether in one’s own language or in the adopted language — as a nomad and a foreigner. For example, in *A Tale of Love*, you know going through the film that there’s hardly any ‘tale’ in the conventional sense of the term. ‘Tale’ as used in the title of the nineteenth-century poem ("The Tale of Kieu") means something quite different from ‘Tale’ as used in the title of my film, which situates itself at the end of the twentieth century. For me, rather than connoting a narrative of legendary events enchantingly composed for amusement, *A Tale of Love* carries the term in its modern connotation, implying a series of fictitiously related events or a fabricated story. Rather than being fabulous, the tale has
grown to be a fabulation. The emphasis is on the making and on the fabricated nature of the work; and since in this case a relationship is drawn between Tale and Love, what is also evoked is the problematic nature of both terms.

I am thinking about this movement from within language, that being foreign to a language comes from the inside, as well as from the outside. I find this interesting in terms of how I myself translate between different languages (Greek and English) and how I move between them with some difficulty (sometimes I lack the rhythm in languages, I feel 'tone' deaf to the musicality of words and the rhythms they produce). To enable yourself this freedom — to see yourself as foreign to language from the inside and the outside — is liberating. The notion of fabulation and the nation that you raise, how fiction operates in relation to language, opens up another relation to love and freedom. And, maybe, the way we make meaning in everyday existence is partly through stories and fiction — and this allows for a freedom and movement in language.

I remember how I once provoked a violent reaction from an anthropologist in an informal gathering by talking of the nation in terms of fiction. Such a reaction is after all very common among those whose rationality and discourse on the modern state still hold on desperately to the fact-versus-fiction dichotomy. But, as respected scientists around the world have been repeating, science cannot do without poetry. The idea of the nation as a homogeneous and anonymous whole is quite obsolete, as the current political situation in the world has amply confirmed. The dictum 'many voices, one people', which was meant to convey the cohesion of the 'many as one' can only be used today to convey the heterogeneity of the 'many in one'. The totalitarian discourse, pedagogy and performance of nationalism may still have a strategical value in certain specific contexts and political languages, but grand narratives have lost their impact as they continue to be contested by storytelling in the margins. Hence, when it comes to the political consciousness of women, refugees and emigrés, or of the diasporas of colour, recognising the notions of nation, country or community as being above all a fiction, a narration, and a fabulation — that is, a product of language — emphasises the constructed nature of cultural authority. It is a way of questioning established power relationships and of giving agency to the oppressed. What is naturalised can be denaturalised. And since stories are made, they can be unmade and remade.

This movement of multiple grafting and 'fasting' in language, of turning an oppressive expression against itself, of deflecting words from their homely meaning, or of mistrusting them as one mistrusts an 'alien', is certainly nothing new among marginalised groups. In the impossibility of speaking or writing otherwise, you're bound to create a language within a language or to pollute, contaminate and 'im-purify' the dominant language. Jean Genet's obsession with betrayal has largely to do with a sense of not belonging (being 'different' from his peers, as a thinker, a poet, an aesthete and a homosexual). He went as far as to make this cruel but astute statement: 'treachery is beautiful if it makes us sing'. As in my writing, I've been speaking of myself all along here, without speaking only of myself. The translator, in Barbara Johnson's term, is a faithful bigamist whose loy-
alties are split between a native and a foreign language. I feel more like a polyandrist, being torn between the use of Vietnamese, French and English, while loving also Spanish and German — two languages which I don’t speak fluently but which, oddly enough, I often use and confuse in my dreams. I’ve always been fascinated by the physical and musical impact of languages. For example, I remember little of Wolof, which I’ve learnt from the years I lived in Senegal, but its inflection and modulation strongly remain with me — the way people nonchalantly suspend the end of their sentences or use sharp onomatopoeias to express a range of feelings.

Needless to say, a body is a resonating tool and individuals are vibrating mechanisms. You certainly ‘feel someone’s vibes’, just as you respond to the deep resonance of a voice. It is through spoken languages that you hear the music of a person and a people. Our language and music are our identity. The issue of whether to nationalise a native language or to continue to use the coloniser’s language remains an important issue in many contexts of the Third World and the diaspora — one that concerned writers have debated at length in their works. To be trilingual, for example, means to be triply faithful and unfaithful to the languages that define oneself and one’s activity. The place of identity being a place of radical multiplicity, as I’ve suggested elsewhere, the question is no longer: Who am I? or What language should I abide by? But Which self? Which language? When, where and how am I? Foreignness is both a space of confinement and a space of non-conformity. Again, it is very difficult to be a stranger, but it is even more so to stop being one.
Sexualities, Identities, New Aboriginalities

Denise Groves

Denise Groves is a writer, academic and cultural theorist. She currently lectures in Aboriginal Studies at Murdoch University. Her recent work has dealt with the aesthetic, political and artistic production of ‘new Aboriginalities’. How do aesthetics and political practices of negotiating past and present experiences figure in the contemporary work of Aboriginal writers and artists? What are the multiple sites of identity that cut across different indigenous experiences of writing and relations to cultural theory? I met Denise at her Perth home in December 1996 to talk about the experiences of writing and the issues pertinent to theorising Aboriginal identities across a range of artistic and political practices.¹

I asked Denise about how experiences of living between different cultures influence her writing and construction of identity.

I

New Aboriginalities

The inspiration for my writing has come from years of thinking about my own identity. There are several areas I can talk about. The first one has to do with the dichotomy that assumes or purports that remote or traditional Aboriginal people are more authentic than urban people; and I don’t see it that way. I was born in Marble Bar, a fairly remote part of Western Australia, and now live in the city of Perth. I see my own identity as continually shifting and myself as an active player in negotiating my identity. As a mother, I am curious about the way my son will construct his identity. In my writing, I am trying to clarify my own position about the processes of identity, so that my son will be in a position to make informed decisions or be very confident about his own identity. I think that when growing up there comes a point in your life, usually around adolescence, when your identity becomes extremely important. And if you are not quite sure about who you are and where you come from it can lead to problems later on in life.

So these are issues that I’ve constantly been thinking about, and there are ways that I have to negotiate the different modalities of my identity. For example, I respond differently with my family in Marble Bar, than I do when I am at Murdoch University as a teacher, or when I am a mother. I think that everyone does that. Somehow in your mind you know that the environment you are in changes the context and performance of the self. When I am with my Aboriginal girlfriends our language and the things that we talk about are different to when I’m with other people. I think a number of these changes and modalities that you move through are influenced by your ‘race’, class, sexuality, gender, background and life experiences.

¹ Associated reading for this conversation, see Denise Groves New Aboriginalities: Creating Multiple Sites (1996).
My presence in Perth is also constantly negotiated. I know, for example, that I am on Nyoongar land and in this ‘Country’ I am considered a ‘foreigner’, a person not from this Country. There are Nyoongar issues that I wouldn’t speak on because I know it would be inappropriate and, most importantly, unethical. However, people see me as some kind of expert because I lecture in Aboriginal Studies. They ask me certain questions in relation to Nyoongar issues and expect an answer. What I tend to do is respond by saying ‘it would be more appropriate to ask a Nyoongar person’ and I would recommend certain people to contact. I have my own sense of ethics about this.

There is so much that has been written about Aboriginal peoples, but I found that when I was researching for ideas, in terms of the multiple sites of Aboriginal identities, there was very little literature written by Aboriginal peoples. There was, however, interesting visual works being done by people such as film-maker and stills photographer Tracey Moffatt, and visual artists Gordon Bennett and Rea Saunders. To me these works were exciting because these artists had found a way of ‘speaking’ that wasn’t constrained by colonialist language. Subsequently they were able to explore their ideas on their own sense of identity and Aboriginality. I became fascinated with their works, and was able to correlate some of their ideas with the writings of ‘post-colonialist’ theorists like Homi Bhabha, Trinh T. Minh-ha and so on — theorists who are interested in challenging dominant notions of identity, essentialism and representation.

I have been influenced by Homi Bhabha’s notion of the ‘third space’, and Trinh T. Minh-ha’s notion of identity being a process of being ‘born over and over again’. For me, identity is a process of negotiation. So I negotiate my experiences of Marble Bar with all my other ‘life’ experiences including those which are currently being lived, to understand and articulate my own sense of identity.

I recently saw a show on Masterpiece about urban Aboriginal artists, and John Mundine, an indigenous curator, said something that really struck me in relation to Aboriginal artists and their works. He said ‘we (as indigenous peoples) need to be honest with ourselves’. He was referring to indigenous artists who were appropriating other Aboriginal peoples’ artworks. For example, some urban artists were doing ‘cross-hatching and dot paintings’, which is not only unethical but the artists are not being honest about their own identity. In a way the artists he was referring to were taking on board colonialist sentiments in relation to ‘authentic’ Aboriginality. This started me thinking. I started looking around in the place that I worked, and at my encounters with different Aboriginal peoples, and I could see that Aboriginal culture was alive and happening but not necessarily in the way that Aboriginality is often represented. What I became interested in was looking at ways in which to validate our contemporary and urban identities.

In terms of my own identity these are things that I’ve been thinking about, and I am not say-

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2 Many indigenous peoples are critical of the term ‘post-colonialism’. It is argued that our lives are still very much governed by ‘colonialist’ government policies.
ing this is how it is. But I talk about the 'white' influences that have been part of my life, and wonder how do I validate these? Why do people see me and only talk about Aboriginal things? I've got a wide range of interests but people only see me as being Aboriginal, and I want to acknowledge all these other factors. It is not saying that I'm any less Aboriginal. But I'm saying there are a number of important factors that have influenced and shaped me. If you look at the work of Tracey Moffatt you can see the influences of white and Aboriginal cultures. When she was interviewed for Bedevil, she talked about how her background has been in white and black cultures, and how this influences her aesthetic practice. And this, for me, was the first time that I had heard about an indigenous person acknowledging whiteness.

Tracey uses the term hybridity to talk about the influences of whiteness. But it is a very complex point. Some people think when you are using the term hybridity you are talking about assimilation, and so people become very wary of it. But I am not saying that. I am supporting the argument which many 'black' cultural critics have argued for, that the whole concept of whiteness needs to be examined — what is white culture? I think Aboriginal people have done a lot to deconstruct the term 'Aboriginal', but white people need to also interrogate the concept of 'whiteness'. We are operating with the binaries of black and white, and recognition needs to be given that white people just as much as Aboriginal people have been homogenised.


Bedevilled

I also encounter binary oppositions when I am teaching. Often when I am asked to lecture I can feel the students are 'bedevilled' (to borrow a term from Tracey Moffatt). Because they are wondering 'who is this woman?' (as I don't fit the stereotypical idea of what an Aboriginal woman is supposed to look like) and 'what is she doing in the class?' and so on for the first ten minutes, there's all this interrogation going on. And the next thing will be 'are her experiences authentic?'

Some people only want to hear the harrowing stories in relation to Aboriginality. They want to hear about deaths in custody or the stolen generations and so on. While I can understand that these are very important issues for Aboriginal peoples, and issues which many white Australians need to be educated on, somehow if we haven't experienced any of these experiences our authenticity is questioned. And people will say when you give a talk or lecture, 'but you haven't mentioned racism'. It is like the agenda that people want us to talk on has already been set.

In feminism, for example, the separatist position concerning gender politics between black and white women is readily accepted. Yet there needs to be a recognition of the ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women are working in collaboration, or how there might be similar experiences that we share as 'women'.
So in a way people are trying to re-authenticate who you are as a speaker, and consequently they cannot hear what you are saying.

People continually come up to me because I’m black and ask me where I’m from. When I say I am Aboriginal, people don’t necessarily accept it. They are continually inquiring, and that is something that I experience on a day-to-day basis. I don’t feel the need to go up to people and say ‘where are you from?’ It’s what a friend of mine interpreted as white being privileged with anonymity. ‘White’ doesn’t have to be explained, it’s somehow self-evident and legitimate. Yet the legitimacy of my identity is questioned. I see it as a type of racism. When I say I am Aboriginal the person who has asked this question has got a stereotypical view in their head of what an Aboriginal person looks like, and their further questioning of my identity, such as ‘Really? But you don’t look Aboriginal’, is questioning my authenticity. Australia’s history is a testament to the ways in which government policies have attempted to construct Aboriginality. What I am interested in is the wider constructions of Aboriginality which go ‘outside’ the dominant understandings about Aboriginal peoples.

Aboriginal cultures are dynamic, yet when people talk about Aboriginal cultures somehow they talk about a society that is pre-contact. What I am saying is that Aboriginal cultures, like all cultures, are changing and you’ve got to accept that, whatever changes they may be.

I want to return to the question of ethics raised earlier. In some of your most recent writing you talk about the textile artist Michelle Brown and the ethical relation she has to her work. You suggest Brown sees her ethics and work in terms of maintaining an integrity of ‘traditional’ forms of Aboriginal art, but she also reworks this to produce her own style and context. This produces a different relation to aesthetic practice and the production of the self. What does this ethical relation mean to you in terms of the production of your writing and relation to questions of identity?

The question of ethics I find extremely important, because as I’ve said before it’s about being honest but also because if you don’t adhere to indigenous ethics you face serious repercussions from your own people. I’m aware, for example, that I am also a young woman. This has an impact on my speaking position. Just because I’m from Marble Bar it doesn’t automatically mean I have a right to speak about issues from that area. There are many more appropriate people. But I think these things you learn either from your family or from your own community experience.

The question of ethics and indigeneity are important issues in terms of writing and speaking about the ‘multiple sites’ of Aboriginal peoples’ identities. How do you negotiate this and work with writers who aren’t indigenous, but may be writing in post-colonial theory or feminist politics. How do you work and negotiate other modes of scholarships, both black and white, and the ethical relation to this?

This is a complicated question. I’ve worked with many non-Aboriginal peoples, particularly non-Aboriginal women, many of whom would identify as being ‘feminist’. Sometimes conflict occurs because some people have been misinformed about Aboriginal issues, or may not be aware of the differing agendas being put forward by Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal women, for example,
have been critical of 'white' feminists who fail to recognise the complexities of issues surrounding race/gender and class. I, like many Aboriginal people, try to educate non-Aboriginal peoples on Aboriginal issues. So even just by doing simple things like encouraging people to say 'Aboriginalities' or 'cultures', as opposed to the singular notion of 'Aboriginal' or 'Aboriginal culture', is important as it reminds people of our diversity. There are some Aboriginal people who feel that non-Aboriginal people should not be writing about Aboriginal issues. This is a complicated area because, as Marcia Langton points out, you are talking about issues of censorship and the universal notion of racism which is based on 'sameness' — all blacks are the same and thus only blacks can write about blacks. I've seen stereotypical representations of Aboriginal peoples put forward by non-Aboriginal peoples but I've also seen similar representations done by Aboriginal peoples. This can be a difficult area to comment on because you are interrogating other Aboriginal peoples' representations of Aboriginality.

II

Present Pasts

The importance of aesthetic and cultural work by Aboriginal artists highlights some of the tensions of negotiating past and present lives. You talk about the artist Gordon Bennett's work as 'always ready always present past'. This notion of 'always ready always present past' puts forward the engagement and encounters with history, and the present cultural and political negotiations with identity.

This idea of Aboriginality is what I take on myself. Everything that I do has been informed by my past, but it is somehow negotiated through the present, in my writing, in day-to-day living and so on. I feel very strongly about my Aboriginality, and this relates to my past and present experiences. My grandmother, for example, has had a profound influence on my life; her experiences, her stories and so on have been passed onto me. When I refer to my childhood I am referring to some of the experiences which have become foundations for the way in which I think and behave.

My Aboriginality has influenced and shaped my experiences. But, at the same time, my father is white, and sometimes I don't feel I can talk about his influence, or in particular his white influence, in the same way that I can readily talk about my Aboriginality. This somehow goes back to a notion that if you start talking about whiteness you are diluting your experiences or your authenticity as an Aboriginal person.

I think these negotiations and talking about whiteness can be scary. When you start talking about Aboriginal identities in relation to hybridity some people interpret this as meaning the solid Aboriginal platform has somehow weakened and become a bit shaky. The criticism is that there will be no platform in which we can align ourselves to. This is what I have been criticised for, but I don't think that this is a problem. Aboriginal people have dealt with this previously, particularly in regards
to the way we prefer to identify through our regional identities. This has not made us politically weaker because through the concept of ‘pan-Aboriginality’ we can talk about issues which are central to us as Aboriginal peoples.

Importantly, I think all of these negotiations are influenced by socio-economic politics of the time. The late eighties and early nineties was a period where people like Tracey, Gordon and Rea were experimenting with different ways of articulating identity. But now we are entering a different period, influenced by the recent change of government. I think Aboriginal people are rethinking their positions. Funding is being cut for various Aboriginal programs, resources are scarce, and we recognise the need more than ever to unite as a ‘peoples’. In a way some of the issues I have been exploring, like the multiplicity of identities, may not be readily accepted.

The recent change of government here has produced a lot of racist backlash in the media, community and political arenas. It will be important to see how different groups negotiate these current trends in terms of theory and political practice.

There was a classic example of this type of racist backlash on one of the local television current affair programs. You could see the way binaries were being employed, and the interplay of stereotypical ideas about Aboriginal people. The story focused on a couple who had come together from previous relationships. This union brought together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal kids. The story, framed in the notion of ‘unfairness’, highlighted the fact that the Aboriginal kids received ‘special benefits’ (Abstudy), while the non-Aboriginal kids got nothing! So there is a way in which public culture continues to use a racist ideology to document history, and Aboriginal peoples’ experiences, as always separate and in conflict. This experience feeds into current government rhetoric about ‘unfairness’ and the unequal division of resources, particular in relation to native title claims.

III

Sexualities

How does sexuality figure in contemporary Aboriginal art? The work of graphic artist Rea has inspired your writing and engagement with talking about sexuality and Aboriginality. In what ways has Rea’s work been important to you in terms of negotiating sexualities, identities and ‘new Aboriginalities’?

Within Aboriginal politics generally, and drawing on my experience as a Women’s Officer with ATSIC\(^3\) and the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the question about ‘race’ versus ‘sex’ is often a sensitive issue. It’s like racism is prioritised over sexism. But Rea is someone who refuses to separate and contain these issues. She goes beyond boundaries: she is Aboriginal, she is a woman and she is a lesbian. She negotiates these different identities and is particularly aware of the way in which her identities shift to accommodate what is happening in a particular space. I found this really inter-

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\(^3\) Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission.
esting and exciting because Rea was able to create a means to incorporate all her different experiences of colonisation. What is important about Rea's work is that she is not compromising in any way, in the same sense that Tracey Moffatt refuses to be compromised in her work and aesthetic practice.

Rea integrates contemporary images and historical realities. She uses computer images that are very bright and have a very contemporary feel about them. Often the images she uses are of her relatives. For example, the historical situation where Aboriginal women served as domestic for white women is integrated into her images. So she presents a past which doesn't get locked into binary opposition of Aboriginal history and white history. Rea is not buying into the past/present dichotomy, rather she sees past experiences intermeshing into the present. For example, one of her computer images is of a large jar. From a distance it appears to be filled with jelly beans but when you go up close the 'jelly beans' are actually body parts. It illustrates the ways in which Aboriginal people were used for different forms of 'scientific' research and the attempts to 'capture' our identity through categorising, labelling and defining Aboriginality.

What I find interesting in both Rea's and Tracey's work are the ways in which they place themselves in the context of their works. Tracey does this by incorporating characters in her films which are in relation to her. For example, she plays her mother, or she will be in the film. She also uses her own stories, and for example in Bedevil she ensures the stories are filmed (located) in her Country. This is a way of presenting issues which many Aboriginal people can identify with, but by doing it in a way with a very present and personal stamp on it.

IV

Aboriginal Pop

The notion of 'experimental' art or aesthetic practice is often precluded from discussions of Aboriginality. You have recently talked about your interest in Aboriginal pop culture. How does the notion of 'pop' figure in contemporary Aboriginal aesthetics? What are some of your new directions around this?

I've only recently starting thinking about this, so these are preliminary remarks. But I am interested in this notion of Aboriginal 'pop' culture, and how in this society Aboriginal 'pop art' is excluded from avant-garde circles. I want to explore and pull apart the prevailing ideas that Aboriginal peoples are somehow not interested in being part of Australian pop culture, how we are only interested in watching/making Aboriginal films and so on. Some of the works that I have been exposed to, and I would include the artists which I have mentioned in this interview, form part of an Aboriginal avant-garde culture. These artists take on dominant culture, rework it, then dish it back. And I think that this is very political and extremely powerful on a number of levels. Particularly if we consider the context of what we have been talking about, that is, it is part of a process which challenges all of us to rethink questions of identity and authenticity.
Senses of Revolt
Julia Kristeva
Translated by Juliana de Nooy

Senses of Revolt is about foreignness, notions of cultural and sexual belonging, and 'senses' of revolution and revolt. This conversation took place at the University of Paris VII (where Julia Kristeva teaches in the Faculty of Sciences of Texts and Documents) in April 1996. We talked about our cultural and political contexts where concepts of 'cosmopolitanism' and 'foreign' take on different historical meanings and shapings of the nation. The concept of foreignness, cultural and sexual belonging, and the aesthetics of these relations, are important issues in Kristeva's work. As a writer and psychoanalyst Kristeva came to the French intellectual scene as a foreigner from Bulgaria. The personal and political experience of being a foreigner in Paris has shaped Kristeva's thoughts on nation, cultural revolt and change in the 1990s.¹

(In the interview we talked not only about foreignness — but, the interview itself, was a foreign experience. I can best describe our dialogue through the art of translation and the foreignness of languages: Kristeva's French and my English (I speak little French and understand even less). An Australian friend in Paris played the role of the interpreter and translated Kristeva's French into English.² The foreignness of languages is mediated through the body: ears, mouth, eyes, in the gestures of the face-to-face meeting, and through the silences and pauses that exist in-between the space of the encounter.

A French scholar translated the oral French into written English. I read Kristeva's responses and created another range of meanings that further punctuated our initial encounter. The movement between and through different modalities of language — from oral to written language, from one language to another, through the boundaries and constraints of different cultures and subject positions — frames and transforms this text. In this sense, the interview as it is re-translated here continues the movements of language to create something else, another text and another foreign experience that belongs to the ears of the reader.)

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I

National Belongings

Why foreignness? The concept of foreignness, of belonging to a language, nation or culture, and the ways in which cross-cultural experiences forge notions of self and identities are important considerations in multi-ethnic societies and nation states. I asked Julia about her writing on foreignness — beginning with her early work on subjectivity and language in 'The Novel as Polylogue', and how the experience of moving between different languages has shaped her cultural and sexual identity.

² I am eternally indebted to Deirdre Gilfedder's humour, diligence and French Lessons!
Senses of Revolt

I think that this [the experience of moving between different languages and cultures] has both a political significance and a personal one. Take for example the period before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when it was impossible to move around freely. Given this situation, what I was referring to in 'The Novel as Polylogue' was the need to live in France — not as a traveller, but by settling, marrying and becoming a French citizen — so as to be able to work within French culture. Certainly, the question that then arises is why I chose to go and work in France and not in some other country. And this question might in turn lead us to consider the notion of the 'nation', and how France, through its universalist Enlightenment tradition, raises the question of the foreigner. Another question, which we might pursue further, is how, once I was settled, I tried to develop a personality in French that isn’t self-effacing, shall we say, and that takes account not only of my character but of my being a woman and of my culture.

I think that French universalism holds a certain fascination for many people, and I myself was susceptible to this. It goes against a more Anglo-Saxon tradition of keeping different cultures separate. Both models can be criticised and I am the first to do so. I’ll just mention in passing that I devoted a chapter of my book on foreigners to a critique of Enlightenment universalism to show how it very quickly forgot about being universal and began to attack foreigners, for example, during the Reign of Terror; additionally, it also forgot the question of women, etc. So I am not someone who doesn’t criticise universalism. But, all things considered, I think my preference still leans toward the French model. Why? Because I believe it is a model that not only allows the universality of human rights to be maintained as a post-religious universe to which moral values are associated, but that also spares us the division into ghettos. Very often, through the idea of the so-called ‘melting-pot’ in the United States, or the generous ideas of métissage or mix of cultures, we end up with a fragmented social fabric where there are communities that live confined within ghettos, with no common denominator. (In fact, the United States is not a melting pot: nothing melted). And it is the idea of unity that is lost, the idea of a bond. I think that, in contrast, through the French revolution, this idea of a bond is maintained, and it is up to us to accommodate differences within the framework of these bonds, but not to take as a starting point differences that we cannot accommodate, once the differences are expressed as a different religion. For example, in England we see a variety of different groups — Hindus, Muslims, Protestants and so on — that are each separate and only come together with difficulty. Certainly, differences have to be re-established in the French model, reworked within the universal frame — which is another problem — but, nevertheless, the linkage is already there.

I think that as far as feminism is concerned, this idea of universality has given a rather distinctive connotation to French feminism, because even in the most exalted period of feminism there was, for example, a demand for a certain universality. That is to say, there was a need to think of the feminine in relation to language, and not to say that women are completely different, or at war with men, or totally marginal. There was a need to think about how women can provide a variant of the
universal bond that is language, and thus to always-already inscribe women in language, which remained as a sort of relic of this universalism. So women are not seen as a sex at war with the other sex, but as a sex in contact, and seeking communication, with the other: it may well be a question of different forms of communication, but even so, the model remains one of a sex placing itself within the universal bond that is language. I think that French work was oriented more towards this universality in a sort of dialectic with the other, than towards the point of view of a war. Furthermore — although there was, no doubt, in certain groups, this idea (with which I disagree) of war with the other sex, or of being marginal, or of the feminine as the inexpressible — I think that in what survives and is for me the most serious part of French feminism, this idea of universality, and of the inscription of women in the universal message, remains present.

But the problem may in fact lie elsewhere. It appears difficult for you and I to communicate about this, given that French society is a traditional society and not a ‘new world’ where people arrive without a fundamental bond, as in America or Australia, where everyone is an immigrant; whereas in France, obviously, there is already a tradition that newcomers slot into, and this historical heritage changes the problem. The problem of métissage therefore does not arise in the same way. By métissage I mean the changing of the basic culture through the arrival of new cultures.

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Although we have different historical and social frameworks I find your writing on nation and identity interesting in an Australian context — that is, your approach to the foreigner. In Strangers to Ourselves you talk about a ‘paradoxical logic of identity’. You write there is ‘a paradoxical community emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognise themselves as foreigners’.

How do you see this paradoxical logic and perhaps this ‘radical’ strangeness emerging with the rise of nationalism and racism around the world?

I think that traditionally the left, and the recent forms of leftism to which I belonged, have greatly underestimated questions of identity, and particularly national identity. As a psychoanalyst I am confronted with this need for identity that is no doubt an archaism of the individual but is also indispensable: to affirm oneself as being something — ‘to be somebody’. And this ‘being’ is difficult to affirm in the course of the child’s development: through the war with the parents, Oedipus, all sorts of adolescent crises, etc. And very often when we have trouble being, we try to compensate for this identity problem by belonging. I am not, but I am one of them, I belong. This is something we see especially among adolescents when they take up a cause, or when they join a group, whether it be an ideological group, or quite simply a cult, or a group of friends — in any case a form of group sup-

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port. And this is true for individuals as it is true for nations. I therefore think that the need for identity — especially when there is a tradition, as is the case for European countries — is something that the movements of the left have easily underestimated, spurred by a generous idea that consists, of course, in opening up towards cosmopolitanism, inviting in foreigners, etc: the idea that ‘all men are brothers’. I believe that in moving too quickly in this cosmopolitan direction, we have declared the nation outmoded, if not reactionary. Now, under the pressure of the current situation you mention in your question (that is to say the fall of the Berlin Wall, unemployment, immigration), the nationals of many countries — the French, perhaps the English, the Spanish, or the Germans, among others — feel a loss of identity. They no longer know where they belong; they have no political ideals, no moral ideals, and therefore fall back on national identity. An unemployed man is no longer Communist, and is not religious, but he is French. He is not, but he is one of them, he belongs. And therefore this belonging is his only means of survival, his only dignity. Now we on the left underestimate this dignity. We say to him: ‘You should show a consideration for the Arab, for the Turk’ and, in so doing, we in fact upset him and fail to understand where he’s hurtling. It’s at that point that the National Front comes along and says: ‘I recognise you as an identity.’ Therefore, I believe that there is a huge task ahead of us in this area in order that generosity towards the other not be taken as a wound to the native’s identity. That’s where there’s a complete balancing job to do. That seems to me to be the essential thing, including within the European framework where nations are afraid of each other. We need to reassure this need for identity, and only once there is reassurance open up towards the other. Otherwise we make ourselves vulnerable to depression, and someone who is depressed cannot turn towards the other.

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What interests me is how the question of the nation and belonging also involves the aesthetic experience of writing: the psychic and historical experience of belonging or not belonging to a community, and the ambiguity of this relation. In your article ‘Marcel Proust: In Search of Identity’ you discuss the sensibility of this cultural belonging. Proust’s own ambiguity of belonging and cultural identities — of living as a Jew and Catholic in France (his mother being a Jew and his father a Catholic) — create an ambiguity of identity for him. What is the relationship of belonging for Proust and the notion of national identity?

Using Proust I tried to speak of something different from what I was just saying. An individual without aesthetic activities needs to belong when he is ‘losing being’, and when he can’t belong to communism or to the church he belongs to the nation, which remains the last bastion against depression. It becomes that without which he is nothing. Rather than being nothing, he prefers to be French. Because he is neither Communist nor Catholic, being French is all that’s left. Just as this is the case for the ‘ordinary’ individual, the question of being is also constantly raised by the aesthetic
experience, where there is no need to belong in order for it to be stabilised. Obviously the artist belongs in some way: the writer belongs to the national language — in Proust’s case, French. But the writer is also, as Mallarmé said, someone who invents words that are foreign. Style is a process of estrangement with regard to language, where you invent something unheard of. At that point, your implantation in language becomes a permanent betrayal of your essence. I understand the work of the writer precisely as a process of transformation and of permanent betrayal of the identical. So Proust was particularly well placed. (It may be true for all writers, more or less, although we can also find examples to the contrary where there is a sort of nationalist fascination — obviously there are fascist writers. But let us say that true stylistic work must put the individual in a position of lucidity, a position where identity is questioned.) For Proust, things were probably somewhat facilitated — or intensified — by the fact that he belonged nowhere, and therefore retained an outsider’s position, allowing him to describe [témoigner] but also to construct things, unities full of contradictions: each flower is both beautiful and ugly; each church is both sublime and in ruin; everything is double; everything is at least ambiguous, and that is the condition of the sublime...

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I wrote a little text called ‘Bulgarie, ma souffrance’ (‘Bulgaria, my pain’) where I go into the details of my ambiguous relation to the Bulgarian language. To be brief let’s say that I think I became detached from this language through my personal history — I learnt French very early, I’ve been living in France for almost thirty years now — and above all by two rather specific processes: namely, on the one hand, psychoanalysis, which reconciled me in a way with my childhood but through French, because I went through analysis in French; and on the other hand the writing of novels, which led me to a more elementary language, more banal and closer to the body than concepts. I therefore feel as though I’ve experienced a sort of rebirth in French, as if I had created another life, another body, almost another personality for myself. Having said this, something that probably comes from the Bulgarian language and mentality remains: I feel especially sensitive to all that is painful. The French consider that pain is something to be laughed at: ‘let’s skip quickly over that’. Maybe I feel things a little more keenly than the French. Or where style is concerned I tend to create metaphors that are heavier, closer to the body [plus charnelles], or syntax that is drawn out, ‘lamentative’ if you like. But these are like deep strata that appear a little, but that I don’t consider to be really Bulgarian — rather something personal perhaps. It becomes something that isn’t recognisably from either national entity, and that makes me a sort of ambiguous thing. But perhaps that is the fate of people today, or of a sort of person straddling two cultures. This group will only increase with the development of communications, the fact that people work between two countries, between two languages. I feel a bit like a precursor if you like.
Sensuous Belongings

The notion of cultural belonging also involves questions of sexual belonging. I would like to return to the issue about feminism that you raise in relation to sexual difference and otherness. In terms of Anglo feminisms, the notion of otherness is highly contentious and problematic. In ‘Women’s Time’ you write about the multiplicity of women, the ways that new generations of feminists encounter and must negotiate relations between power, meaning and language. How does the notion of ‘difference’ in this relationship to power enable a way of exploring the multiplicities of women.

I’ve been trying to elaborate this better lately by looking at the development of young girls and their relation to language. Everyone knows that girls are more mature than boys and quickly get higher marks, do tremendously well at school, and then it stops. And what has struck me is the impression I have that this easy relation to language and to thought conceals a certain foreignness or extraneousness [étrangété]. For girls, the order of language and of thought, as well as the social bond that goes with the symbolic order — all connoted as paternal — are important. In order to be subjects girls have situated themselves, identified with this order. So that, as a girl, I have to win, I have to be at school, I have to speak like everybody else, but, on the other hand, I know that all of that is connoted as masculine and everything phallic is foreign to me, so I perceive language as something illusory.

I am very struck by this attitude of women who incorporate the order of thought and ethics and so on, but still maintain an attitude of reservation: it’s illusory, it’s not essential. So what is essential? We don’t really know. Perhaps it’s something sensory, something tied to the daughter/mother relation, tied to the invisibility of the sex organs, tied to a sensoriality prior to language or underlying it. In any case, there is this feeling of foreignness with regard to meaning, thought and the [symbolic] order that appears to me to be both a handicap for women — because on that basis, if you don’t really believe in it, well, you don’t make much of an effort — and at the same time an advantage, because it gives us an attitude of distance, which is a critical and creative one. To pursue this a little, there is a sentence by Hegel that I like to quote, which says that women are ‘the eternal irony of the community’. If they are an irony, I think it stems from that. For a very long time I didn’t understand why women were supposed to be an eternal irony of the community because they are not necessarily funny. There are a few female humorists, but not everybody’s like that. I think Hegel perceived this attitude of women who don’t believe, but who function, who bustle about. Besides, when you don’t believe, you can be even more efficient, you give more of yourself... but you don’t believe. It’s this attitude, an attitude of demystification, which seems to me to be very productive, and opens up new forms of atheism, of disbelief, and of freedom.
The sensoriality of language and the symbolic constitution of the self in relation to power involves the ethics of psychoanalysis — an ethics that locates the issues of revolt and rebellion in the psyche, soul and community. You have written that ‘the ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics’. In relation to power and notions of ‘difference’, what are the ethical and political possibilities of psychoanalysis in the late twentieth century — where the notion of the soul, psyche and power has radically changed?

What interests me at the moment is that Freud is currently under attack, particularly in America. In the United States an exhibition that had been planned to take place at the National Library was cancelled following the criticisms of Freud — made by cognitive scientists, biologists, but also feminists — as someone who is not serious, or who refuses reality, or who supports child abuse. For example, they maintain that in so far as Freud says that everything is fantasy, the fact that children are seduced by parents is denied, the result being that Freud exonerates seducers and criminals — all sorts of stupid statements that amount to a rejection, a sort of depreciation of psychoanalysis that has to do with puritanism, I think, and with a sort of culture of conformism. In contrast, what interests me is that the thought of Freud enables us firstly to posit the difference between the sexes, to try to raise questions about this difference, and to restore the dignity of each one in its difference without confusing them.

I write of the thought of Freud as one of revolt. In the word ‘revolt’ there is an etymological signification that is not apparent in the political sense of the term, namely, that of a ‘return to the past’ or of a ‘displacement’: to go backwards, as in Nietzsche’s eternal return, but also to displace, as in Remembrance of Things Past, the Proustian sense. In Freud’s anamnesis, he allows us to revolt in relation to norms, to what is established, to the past. I prefer to speak of psychoanalysis as one of the last remaining ‘revolt cultures’ [cultures-révoltes], because we cannot revolt against power — we don’t really know where it is: democracies are decaying; there are no goodies and baddies; it’s difficult to find values that would give rise to a revolt in the classical sense of the term, in the political sense from the time of the Second World War. Perhaps the only revolt that remains is the appropriation of the past and its displacement. Psychoanalysts like Winnicott have spoken of psychoanalysis as a rebirth, and I’m going a little in that direction, but I prefer to speak of revolt from a less paediatric and less benevolent point of view, to show a slightly more aggressive, more dynamic side to this adventure, a less religious one (in rebirth there is perhaps the idea of Christian resurrection). So I place myself in another tradition: I think that psychoanalysis has an ethical value, in the sense that it remains the site of this transformation of human beings, which is a real possibility of psychical life. To change, to be able to alter, is a form of revolt.

In my latest work I explore these issues of revolt. Sense and Non-sense of Revolt is a collection of essays based directly on the seminar that I gave last year (1994–1995) at the University of Paris VII: some of my students taped my lectures and then transcribed them, the result being that the book
retains the style of ‘direct speech’. I’m continuing the seminar now in 1995–1996, which will result in a second volume. The first volume is a reflection influenced by psychoanalysis that revolves around three recent authors: Aragon, Sartre and Barthes. Of course the names of these authors indicate — at least to a French reader — three extremely important experiences in recent French culture, i.e. surrealism and communism with Aragon, existentialism with Sartre, and structuralism with Barthes. For me these are experiences that show that revolt is inherent in culture. Each is a case of thought in revolt that opened new paths, but also got stuck — some at least, if not all — in dead ends. I try to analyse these two aspects, hence Sense and Non-sense of Revolt. The analytical contribution, which takes up the first part of the seminar and therefore of the book, consists in showing that for analysts revolt is indispensable to psychological life, that the human being only lives, only gains independence and thus creativity, by revolt, by the possibility of opposing symbolic law and of taking up a position within it. This is what we have learnt through the Freudian account and its legacy, if only through Oedipus. We speak of the Oedipal revolt: Oedipus, the one that wants to sleep with his mother, kill his father… all that has become a sort of slapstick cliché of psychoanalysis, but it basically shows that rebellion is inherent in psychological life.

I believe that it is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to elaborate a revolt culture at the end of the twentieth century. On the one hand, revolt culture is essential for the cultural heritage of our civilisation. I consider that, for example, even Descartes’ doubt or Hegel’s negativity, and the whole avant-garde culture from Picasso to Artaud and whomever you’d like to name, are in revolt. But this culture is becoming more and more impossible. Why? Because we are in what is now called the ‘new world order’. This new world order is not fascism, as we are often told — for example, many intellectuals, horrified at what’s happening, speak of a ‘new fascism’. It is not really new fascism, it’s a power vacuum: we don’t know who is governing, which is the dominant party (in western democracies in any case, I think). There is really no government that knows what it wants, with a project — so let’s call it a power vacuum. The human person is becoming more and more like a robot, and ignored. Even with regard to our organs we are no longer subjects: we are organs that can be converted into cash. In certain countries there are even people who sell their retina or spleen to survive. So there is a sort of dismantling of the notion of the subject in favour of a conception of the human being as organs. And along with all that we also have the society of spectacle [la société de spectacle], which means that there is no fixed identity, even for a news item: each item dissolves into a flash, an impression. We switch from channel to channel: the very image of the event is fragmented. Those who watch television do not have a representation of the identity of anything at all, so in this world — which has its advantages, I don’t think everything is negative — what become impossible are new forms of revolt culture. Before we find these new forms, I thought it was perhaps necessary to do a

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4 In this conversation, Julia Kristeva is referring to the first of these volumes which was published in France May 1996. The second volume The Intimate Revolt (La Révolte Intime) was published the following year in France.
little of the history of the ones immediately preceding and very close to us. Perhaps, moving on from there, we can start up a revolt culture in new ways, because at the moment all we have is a show culture, a culture of spectacle, and not a fundamental culture. So that is the question that I open up with this book, but for which there is as yet no answer. It’s an inquiry.
Reinventing Selves
Sneja Gunew

Sneja Gunew writes on the complexities of belonging, the imaginary relations and haunting experiences of traversing different languages and cultures. How do imaginary relations to a language and culture influence relations to place? How do language and identity translate into different cultural contexts? What are the relationships between dominant and minor literatures? How do we perform ethnicities and cultural identities? Sneja’s feminist work on cultural difference and minority literature has influenced generations of ‘ethnic’ writers in Australia. Her work is influenced by her own ‘foreignness’ — daughter of a Bulgarian father and German mother. As writer and cultural theorist, her work has been imperative to the recognition and proliferation of ethnic and indigenous writings in Australia and now in Canada, where she currently lives. Sneja is Professor of English and Women’s Studies at the University of British Columbia.

We met at her Vancouver home in May 1996 to discuss foreignness, cultural translation, the differences between Canadian and Australian notions of nation, the politics of minority writing, and cultural nostalgia. I asked Sneja about her experience of being a foreigner and how this frames her writing.1

I

On Foreignness

To be described as a foreigner in Australia is very much a matter of interpellation because I was in Australia from the age of four and did all my schooling in Australia. And yet, because of the name, because of the kinds of corporeal characteristics that mark one off as different, I was made to feel that I was not Australian. Although, where I grew up on the outskirts of western Melbourne in St Albans it was very much an old working-class Australian community that had been overtaken, settled, colonised really, by immigrants in the post-war period. So, going through primary and high school wasn’t so much an issue of being foreign. In fact, I think it enabled all of us coming from various parts of the world to produce quite significant material manifestations of our intellectual energies to the extent that the high school I was at became quite famous in the state at the time.

I think it was when I hit Melbourne University that I was made to feel I was very foreign. At the time, Sam Goldberg was there and I remember taking his seminar course. I can’t remember the title of it, but it was about certain aspects of western intellectual traditions and he had a very European outlook on these manifestations. But that reinforcing experience was very much balanced

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by the Leavisite orientation of Melbourne’s English department at the time. There were certain kinds of assumptions about innate kinds of sensibility where you picked up certain messages from literature which either made you a better person or not. Of course I didn’t have the socialisation into British mores which might allow me to claim those kinds of sensibilities.

At the same time, it wasn’t just a matter of being foreign in some kind of totalising way, because it is also a matter of class positioning, which is often forgotten in these discussions of cultural difference, migrant differences etc. Since my parents were middle-class professionals there was a certain kind of confidence in one’s cultural capital that people who came from working or rural classes might not have had to the same degree. There is a hoary old example that I always like to pull out. When we were in undergraduate English we were reading Dostoevsky as an English writer. I was perfectly aware of the fact that Dostoevsky, outside the kind of Leavisite ‘great tradition’, was of course not a British writer. In fact I read both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky first in German translations! This kind of knowledge one imbibed as part of a bourgeois upbringing. I think that made a difference and continues to make a difference.

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Being foreign gave me a certain kind of scepticism, as did the fact that my first language was German, but, alas, I never learnt Bulgarian. I did go to the Saturday schools for Russian to the extent that I could take Russian dictation, but I didn’t continue it, so it kind of slipped away again. But the fact that I had a certain kind of class upbringing and a first encounter with a language other than English gave me a certain resistance to the kinds of socialisation that I received as part of being educated in Australia. This is of course easier to define in retrospect. I had a growing anger at the ways in which the post-war migrants were being excluded from the public domain, the public sphere — the spectrum of politics. My parents, especially my mother, were both highly literate politically and there was a sense in which they were never really able to exercise this dimension. This is probably what spurred me, in some ways, into the desire to become a public intellectual. So that sense of loss or somehow fulfilling something that had not been possible for my parents’ generation was part of it too.

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How does the ‘unknown’ influence of Bulgaria and Germany (ie, as ‘alien’ and uncanny) shape your relations to place and notions of home as a foreigner? How does the uncanny permeate your writing?

My imaginary relations to Bulgaria and Germany, and the uncanny projections these entail, permeate all my work. But when I invoke those terms ‘Germany’ or ‘Bulgaria’ these aren’t so much
places as narratives about places, and I really believe that all our relations to place are mediated in these ways. Language is central to these constructs also — my first language, German, which continues to haunt my English, and the ‘absence’ of Bulgarian, which also constitutes a kind of spectral space. I have tried to write about these psychic processes in two ficto-critical pieces on my mother and father respectively.

But my relationship to Australia is also quite imaginary and I have attempted to write about the uncanny there in that early essay published in the *Nation and Narration* collection. The direction of my new work, around the diasporic condition, is a further attempt to approach these fundamental issues and obviously I find it easier to do this work while maintaining an ostentatious diasporic state! I am actually very suspicious of the kinds of essentialism that people attach to their dwelling on or in a particular geo-political place. I think it serves to hide those imaginary relations that we all erect, and so in a sense they control us unconsciously and lead to the kinds of warfare we are continuously experiencing in the world.

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Why did I decide to come to Canada and how did that change the conditions under which I produced my work? I did it because I have always been very aware of habitual ways of thinking which can be very paralysing without your realising it. You can fall into certain habits of thought, certain assumptions, and I invariably try to test this constantly (as much as one can). So moving to Canada was a way, again, of questioning everything, testing all my assumptions, testing all the theories that I work with. It was also because I was aware of the ways in which working with cultural difference was far more developed in the Canadian context than it was in Australia. I really felt, especially in the early nineties, locked into a very reductionist position as a public intellectual on matters multicultural, or multicultural politics. And I really wanted to get out of that, because I felt that I was back-peddling in many ways and that I never could get to further stages of intellectual work. Coming to Canada has certainly changed the conditions of my work because I have reinvented myself as a post-colonial critic and teacher; multiculturalism comes into it differently. It is not foregrounded in daily politics in the same way. I am, mind you, barely at the end of my third year so it is not as though ‘multiculturalism’ is not there, but I suppose we can go into that later. In some ways I have had to reposition myself very differently. I am certainly not trying to be, and can no longer claim to be, the public intellectual that I was in Australia. And that has been interesting and I think quite useful in many ways. So I have been driven back into a more privatised critical world than I was in Australia.
A Post-colonial Critic

How did you have to reinvent yourself as a post-colonial critic and teacher? What are some of the differences between reinventing yourself as a post-colonial critic and the experiences of being defined as a public intellectual on issues of multiculturalism?

I did use post-colonial theory as it emerged in my attempts to theorise a framework for multicultural writing in Australia. But, at that time, I also felt that I was in a sense rewriting certain narratives of Australian literature/culture. The interesting paradox, or irony perhaps, has been that in the Canadian context I was appointed to inject post-colonial theory (it is not even called post-colonial) into what are still predominantly known as Commonwealth literatures and Commonwealth literary studies. So, for example, I teach Australian literature in the Canadian context, and that has been one of those examples where I have had to rethink many of my assumptions on how I position myself. In some ways, I suppose, Australian literature in certain kinds of formations was what I was writing against in Australia. In Canada it is quite different. I construct a certain version of Australian literature, which is not canonical I must say, and maybe this is my revenge, but I quite unabashedly tell my students that the emphasis on the non-canonical is my rationale for these courses. I teach what would be considered minority or marginal writers as part of these survey courses on Australian literature which are situated within other kinds of Commonwealth literatures. So I teach Aboriginal and other indigenous writing, and I give them some of the issues around indigenous politics in Australia and New Zealand. I also give them migrant or multicultural ethnic minority writers. The arena is much more specific here, in terms of interacting with my Canadian students and trying to give them a sense of the politics, the cultural context of Australia and Australian writing. It has been a really interesting experience and that has actually meant that a lot of things; a lot of the assumptions have to be restated quite differently. At the graduate level, it has been easier in the sense that one deals with the holy trinity of post-colonial theory: Spivak, Said and Bhabha. So you can teach a kind of classic post-colonial theory which is not as problematic. It is easier because the comprehension exercise at one level is to get people to understand what these theories are about and what kinds of critical and philosophical traditions they are building on and critiquing in various ways. There doesn’t have to be a situating of the self in quite the same way.

To talk at a very specific institutional level, cultural studies simply does not have the purchase in Canada, or indeed even in North America, that it does in Australia. In North America and Canada students are framed far more by traditional disciplinary structures. It is quite difficult to do the kind of interdisciplinary work that cultural studies demands, and the other aspect, to give you a very concrete example, is that film — which to me was a logical part of teaching cultural studies — is almost impossible to teach in Canada because of stringent copyright laws. So you are limited to generic
boundaries (like literature) and it becomes quite difficult to move across different media. It can be done, but it is quite a process and very costly for the students. So that is what I mean by very concrete limitations to what one can do.

But to answer the direction of your question, what’s different here is there isn’t a sense of aggressive and anxious nationalist rhetoric. In other words, there isn’t quite that kind of Anglo-Celtic hegemony here that there is in Australia, because from the beginning there have been two founding nations — France and England — and that difference is built in. There has also been, in some ways, much more progress in the recognition of indigenous rights. For example, the province at the moment has made, in principle, a settlement with the Niiga’a that goes much further than the Mabo recognition of native title. I’m not saying that the debates haven’t got their reactionary element, they certainly do, but there is much more of an awareness of these claims and these rights, and the kinds of cultural differences entail within the broader kind of cultural sphere. So when I encounter my students I don’t have to do that primary work because they don’t automatically reach for a certain notion of national culture that is perhaps the case in Australia. There is already a questioning and attentiveness that one can build on in all kinds of ways.

The other element that is very predominant on the west coast of Canada is that we have huge immigration from the Asia Pacific area, and I think the Chinese Canadians in Vancouver are almost the second largest non-English-speaking group. They have overtaken the Germans and Italians. So there is a huge mixture of Asian diasporas (‘Asian’ is one of those totalising terms that one tries to avoid) in all its variations — there are not just Chinese, but also diasporas from the Punjab, Sri Lanka and India etc. There is much more of a sense of cultural difference here that you and your students work within, and that presents its own complexities.

I have to explain here that English departments in Canada are huge by comparison with Australia because they are involved in the business known as ‘service teaching’. In other words, every Canadian university student has to take a certain number of courses in English studies. So in the first-year courses there are four thousand students at UBC (University of British Columbia) and last year I taught a class of a hundred. They were specialising in science or business studies or what have you and I was trying to expose them to various dominant literary genres, as one does: the novel, poetry, prose, etc. I was suddenly up against a total wall in terms of cultural literacy. All the reference points that I had taken for granted in a European framework didn’t work because two-thirds of my students came from a variety of cultural backgrounds: Hong Kong, Singapore etc. In spite of the legacy of English colonialism in that part of the world I was faced not just with their varying difficulties with writing, expressing or communicating in English, but with a much more deep-seated problem in terms of cultural reference points. For example, even when I was teaching Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* I discovered that half my class had never encountered any of the 130 or so Hollywood versions. I couldn’t take anything for granted, and it became more acute as we progressed through
the other texts. The universities in the province here (as well as universities in the east of Canada) have to deal with all kinds of cultural differences, and the institutions have not been able to respond fully to the populations who come from non-European backgrounds.

In many ways, some of these questions around cultural literacy and relations to different cultural texts also operate in Australia. We have cultural studies, and better relations to visual media and film texts, but the teaching practice itself hasn’t been dealt with sufficiently.

Precisely. That’s what I think has to happen at an institutional level; and that will have ramifications in how we theorise these differences. Certainly the graduate students I’m encountering who come from varieties of these Asian backgrounds come partly out of frustration, because they haven’t been able to find recognition in the ways they are trying to theorise these differences, as distinct from assimilating them into the prevailing modes of English departments which are still very dominant here.

I think this is a question for European migrants (eg Greeks, Italians) who can assimilate and incorporate ‘Asia’ in their own theorisations of cultural difference. Certainly there has been a lot of feminist debates and writings about the question of difference, and the appropriating of indigenous women and ‘third world’ women. But there can be a blind spot in some ‘ethnic’ women’s writing.

In Australia, yes. But, it doesn’t happen so much here any more. For instance, I have been suddenly catapulted into the hegemonic. The stumbling factor over my name, over how one looks etc., is far less obvious here. I am increasingly lumped together with those who are simply perceived as non-Asian. That has been an interesting and sobering experience and I have had to accommodate this because I work in women’s studies as well as English. Those debates in feminist theory, those differences among women, have been in two broad directions. One of them is concerned with being Asian in all its manifestations, and the other concerns queer theory. Since I don’t have reductively conceived credentials in either, I’m lumped into the hegemonic in that crude form of identity politics. Which, of course, I am busily disrupting in various ways!

★

How do you think about the question of the ‘East’ and ‘Asia’ in some of your more recent works?

One of the things that has happened is that there has been a reconnection with Eastern Europe. This comes from my father’s side of things and I’m now forming precarious contacts with Bulgarian intellectuals and hope to be lecturing at the University of Sofia soon. I am very interested in how Eastern Europe has been seen as the borderline between Asia and Europe. Writers like Slavenka Draculic are interesting on this subject, for example in her collection of essays Café Europa. It has been one of those blurry areas that has been as much a part of Asia as it is part of Europe. This has been partly via religion but it is also not just in terms of the obvious ones: you have Islam with-
in Bulgaria, for example, and within other Eastern Europe countries, as we’ve found with the former Yugoslavia. But you also have the Orthodox religion that has always been regarded as the Asian part of Christianity — as you know from your own background. So that has been quite an interesting deliberate re-engagement with that notion of what does European/non-European mean, especially in those borderline areas of Eastern Europe. In terms of my own research I am looking at comparative, theoretical perspectives on how one theorises minority literatures, multiculturalism and concepts like that. So I’ve been doing quite a lot of work in those areas, partly to engage with my students in order to present a much more multidimensional response to that, but also because, again, it is a way of testing certain kinds of assumptions that one has made about Europeanness, about the differences between the ‘West and the rest’ (that cliché that is repeated in relation to post-colonialism). Because the way one is legitimated to theorise is very much put into question along the spectrum of what is European, what is non-European and to what extent, within the notion of crude identity politics, one is not Asian. I take very seriously Gayatri Spivak who articulates this dilemma as the idea that in order to be really engaged with another culture one has to learn the language of another culture — so that the rethinking of language is very much at the heart of this. I am trying to learn other languages, perhaps not complete languages, but at least some aspects of them.

It is important, I think, what you are saying about Eastern Europe and the blurring between the East and the West. This seems to be related to changing political conditions there: the transition between communism and post-communism. And that complicates the questions around the blurring of boundaries, and also leads to a whole set of prejudices (from the West around concepts of freedom, and nation etc.) and ways of understanding the changes in countries like Bulgaria.

This is early days for me, but I know this interest has surfaced around a number of issues. First of all, there is my own icon of Julia Kristeva. Bulgarian feminists situate her very differently and there have been quite critical readings of the North American interpretation of her (even the French really). They argue the Americans don’t really understand the problem of translation itself and there is no recognition whatsoever of the ‘Bulgarianess’ of Kristeva. In some ways, this is part of the buffer zone between Eastern and Western Europe and I think her early book about Chinese women was an engagement with this (and this has been insufficiently recognised). It is important to remember that Kristeva was introduced to French intellectuals as the foreigner, étrangère, but that has somehow been forgotten. There is also the fact that her legacy, or rather her trajectory, has been via Greek too. And it’s the Greekness of Kristeva as part of that Eastern European Bulgarian tradition that has been forgotten as well. The other aspect, for me, has been through my engagement with feminism. The other time this confronted me very formidably was with Japanese feminism. There is a very different construction of feminism which to some extent is hostile to a hegemonic, mainstream feminism that emanates from North American or the UK western feminism. So it is very sceptical of some of the doxa of western, American feminism and European and Anglo feminism. I am very sym-
pathetic to that scepticism, so that is the other big direction that I am hoping to expand on. Because the Bulgarian areas in their post-communist phase, as many others of these countries, are working towards a new nationalism it will be interesting to see how they deal with their tradition of intolerance towards their own minorities. There are a number of Bulgarian intellectuals who view this with a great degree of alarm and are very interested to find out some of the possibilities inherent in the discourses of multiculturalism and cultural difference as they have developed in other parts of the world. In other words, how do you argue against the kind of emergent nationalism which has led us into all kinds of perilous places, as we know from recent history?

How do you think through these questions of nationalism through a framework of cultural difference?

One of the hostilities which seems to be a refrain that occurs throughout Eastern Europe is against gypsies. There has been quite compelling work in recent times that looks at diaspora, which is my particular concern, that is, how one theorises diasporic cultures — diaspora in relation to those who really do not claim any particular territory, like the gypsies. The gypsies have been very much a target, say, in Bulgaria, in Eastern European countries and elsewhere and have been theorised as those who are without territory but not without language and culture. It is a kind of disaggregation of those unities of nation and territory which represent to me a quite healthy direction and this is one of the ways to engage with questions of cultural difference.

I have found some of the writing on ‘exile’ useful in this way. I am thinking specifically about Julia Kristeva here and her notion of exile in language, but also the notion of being exiled from one’s home and territory or family (she says ‘How can one avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger to one’s own country, language, sex and identity?’)\(^2\) The notion of being in exile creates a certain sort of distance (and dissidence) from a kind of unitary construction of nation and claims to territory.

To use the term ‘exile’ presupposes that there was some originary place — where one is exiled from. And that way of theorising has been around in various and quite different forms: Rosi Braidotti does it in her book about the nomadic, and it also occurs in some other theories, like Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of de-territorialisation. But the idea of exile, of cultural, linguistic identity, has to be uncoupled from a notion of place, because there are obvious reasons why dangers can arise. On the one hand, I am aware of the new kinds of theorising of space and place, especially in terms of the politics of indigeneity; one respects the need for this anchoring and for a different conceptionalisation of that. On the other hand, given my history as a child of displaced persons post-Second World War, one of whom is German, there is a real wariness of this constant duo — of this notion of identity and place, of blood and belonging. So, I resist the idea of exile as it is tied to territory.

In a different sense, the way Kristeva talks about it, there is an exilic factor already inhabiting the notion of place or territory. What you are signalling is some of the problems with exile when it is tied to a ter-

\(^2\) Julia Kristeva talks about exile across a range of her theoretical writings (in this context, see Kristeva ‘A New Type of Intellectual: ‘The Dissident’ (1986b: 298).
ritory or ‘origin’, and I certainly would agree with that. But I think there is heterogeneity within the very concept of origin: the space or place of occupation. So exile, in that sense, would be about having to challenge the concept of nation and identity from within its very foundations. (In a different way, Edward Said talks about the need to reconsider the notion of exile in its politico-geographical relations to nation and human suffering, e.g. his writing on Palestine.)

What does not being in exile consist of? If you see it in terms of exile, what is the other side of it? The notion of the nation, the narrative of the nation, is not just hostile to minority groups, it is also intrinsically hostile in the way it has constructed women. I understand all the paradoxes as someone who has fervently always problematized how cultural difference is maintained, and in part it is a territorial matter; a matter of spatial designations. But I suppose I am very resistant to this idea of the ownership and possession of political boundaries in relation to space and place. It seems to me that you always have the question of who owns that space and that is where you have the most horrendous battles and the most terrible destruction of all kinds of differences, as we are constantly finding, including the kinds of battles around indigenous land rights even in the most benign and enlightened places. What it produces in terms of counter-discourse is just so terrible. That is why I have a real wariness now to this notion of laying claim to particular institutional territories. I think Vijay Mishra pointed this out in his article on Helen Demidenko (in Meanjin) about who owns Australian literature. It makes a lot of sense in terms of looking and assessing retroactively the kind of work that I was trying to do, and my naivety in terms of being surprised at the hostility that I provoked. This is really about ownership again, that is, who owns the institution and who is legitimated within it. We need to think in other languages, but even in English we need to come from other directions — to collect and give significance to other writings. But the notion of who has the right to speak is often linked with the notion of the ‘proper’ — property in various ways. It can be an institution or it can be, as we said before, connected to land or possession of territory.

III

Translations: Ethics, Teachings, Politics

The theme of translation and the texture of language shape the relations to identity, but also the critical practices that we can engage in as feminists and academics. I want to come back to the point about Gayatri Spivak, language and the question of translation. I am thinking of Spivak’s article, ‘The Politics of Translation’ (from her book Outside in the Teaching Machine) which deals with translation, pedagogical relations and critical practices. She writes about the politics of translation at the level of language, but also in terms of feminist politics. Importantly, she states the complexities of translating different cultural texts and she says, ‘no amount of tough talk can get around the fact that translation is the most intimate act of reading’. How do you see the politics of translation (and reading) in Australia and Canada where there are politically
sensitive issues around migrants and indigenous women’s texts?

This begs the question of how one takes up the meaning of ‘intimate’, and from my memory of Spivak’s work she traces it in three stages, and I don’t know if I remember the three but certainly the first stage is that you give yourself over to the text (and that is in line with the notion of the intimate), that you are passive in relation to the text, you surrender to the text. I think this is one of the ways in which she puts it. But the other question is what is it that you are surrendering to, what is the extent to which you then feel your way into the text and what is this text that you think you are encountering? The next stage I am probably misrepresenting to some degree. She suggests that the task of a good translator is to represent in some ways the histories of that interaction, and that is partly the politics and the ethics of the translation. So that you don’t, for example, assimilate the other text into what is already known, the text of the other; but you represent the resistances, the otherness. That is, as part of your translation, you represent the foreignness, the untranslatability, the incommensurable. This gives you the dimensions of meaning that cannot be translated, because you cannot simply map one culture onto the other or one language onto the other. I think the recognition of that is partly at an unconscious level. And trying to bring that into the conscious level is an impossible but also very challenging process. So I am very conscious of that at the moment, partly because everything I encounter in a way is so different here, and partly because it is so similar. One of the things I was saying to you in preparing for this interview was that what’s been interesting to me in my transition is how foreign in some ways Australia seems to me now. For example, translating pedagogical processes for visiting Australian academics. The institutional frameworks are so different in a lot of ways that I keep having to explain in terms of footnotes — I keep footnoting the speech of both sides, or the communication of both sides. So that has been an interesting kind of transition and that politics of translation to me means to foreground these aspects instead of pretending that we are in fact part of the same continuum and we all mean the same thing. We don’t. And it is where we don’t mean the same thing that I like to dwell, because for me that is where the politics are located. This is partly what I was saying before. When I am teaching Australian literature to my Canadian students and we are dealing with indigenous texts by Australians or by New Zealanders, I get them to talk to me about their encounters with indigenous Canadian texts. We talk about some of those differences but also some of the similarities in terms of politics.

What is imperative is the ethical relationship involved in teaching indigenous and migrant texts. How we write and teach in an ethical way is a very pressing question in terms of thinking through cultural difference. What I have been trying to work through, to a certain extent, in my own work — in teaching and research — is the question of ethics and this relationship to the ‘other’. What do you think are some of the pedagogical (and critical) practices that we need to take up?

You have to teach a lot of history, which is quite difficult in the specific disciplinary framework that I am now in; and perhaps it is easier in Women’s Studies than in an English course, where
the expectations are that you do not teach history. If I were to teach cultural studies, multicultural writing courses (in Australia again), I would teach them with much more history. I would teach the history of Australian migration among other things — which at least now exists in documented forms. When I first started there wasn’t much around. So you need to provide context, and foreground the fact that the teaching of history is a kind of language too. You have to explain so much; it is like doing an edited version of a canonical text. You have to provide a lot of footnotes to locate and contextualise various texts. When I am dealing with some of the indigenous texts I use the Paperbark anthology for example. The surface meaning is deceptively simple, but you have to do a lot of work to undo that supposed simplicity and to make those texts far more opaque, to problematise them. I find this quite frustrating really — I don’t know how you feel about that — because I think that at a certain level it is quite impossible what we are trying to do.

It certainly is, but at the same time it offers me a sense of being able to locate myself and the positiveness of being able to do this (which I don’t think I could have done in the past). Because — as you have signalled in your own work, in your own history — there has been an overwhelming silence around these issues; for example, the lack of texts on migration history and all those sorts of things. And it has only been through your work and others’ that we can open up this field and terrain — even though it is this extra workload or having to carry another burden.

But I guess it is a matter of age and maybe it is another translation for me as well or a reinvention of me in terms of the public intellectual. Certainly I am very conscious of being institutionally positioned. I wish to work to change that institutional framework here also. One’s institutional history and how you can speak from within those frameworks are questions for you too, because I think the kind of work that you, Efi [Hatzimanolis] and others are doing at the moment is still very much an uphill battle — the extent to which you can create an institutional space that isn’t a sort of annex. I was really depressed (but that is not hard to do for me whenever I get these bulletins from Australia) when I recently saw Jenny Digby’s interview with Antigone Kefala, where once again, after all the meticulous ways Antigone tried to represent the history of her own work and the way it has been taken up, the landmark in terms of locating where those debates become part of the public arena was Robert Dessai’s article.\(^3\) And, of course, now the other great moment is the [Helen] Demidenko affair.\(^4\) Those are the moments that are taken as the mainstream cultural history of this ‘ethnic’ minority writing. I find that depressing given all the work that people like you and others, that we all have been doing for a number of decades now.


\(^4\) Helen Demidenko’s book The Hand That Signed The Paper (published in 1995) won the prestigious literary award in Australia — The Miles Franklin Award. The book was heralded as conveying migrant experiences. But it was revealed that Helen Demidenko the Ukrainian migrant writer was in fact Helen Darville, the daughter of British immigrants. The author and the book were discredited because of what was perceived as a hoax.
IV

Performing Ethnicities — Nostalgia and Minority Writing

In your book Framing Marginality, you write about Antigone Kefala, Ania Walwicz, Rosa Cappiello and Anna Couani’s work, and how they use language to problematise the nostalgic ways ethnic minority writing has been taken up in Australia. How do you see their writing, and the different styles of language they employ like ‘cut up’ and ‘collage’, as significant in challenging a dominant nostalgia?

One of the ways I might consider looking at that work again, were I to write about it, would be in a tradition of modernism and perhaps attendant post-modernism. In some ways, that device of collage belongs to high modernism. And there is a way of looking at it, using Homi Bhabha’s notion of time lag, in relation to modernism and modernity. It exists as well in Arjun Appadurai’s work on modernity. In other words, the notion of the time lag is that you look at this writing in relation to modernism and a different mapping of modernity in Australian writing. That might be another way, a more productive way, because I was trying to get this work recognised as writing and as literature, rather than as sociological documents. So I think situating it as part of modernism and the history of modernism in Australian writing would be another tactic to use.

I think this notion of time lag and modernity raises crucial issues in breaking the frame of a dominant culture’s nostalgia for ethnic writing. In a slightly different way, you talk about the need to break with a dominant nostalgia for ethnic writing in your article on Helen Demidenko. In this paper, ‘Performing Australian Ethnicity’, you raise two important issues on this debate: you discuss a notion of ‘performing ethnicity’ — nostalgia and cultural performance — and how the question of ‘authenticity’ continues to haunt the reception of minority writing in Australia.

Again it is authentic for whom? In exile from what? That is in essence what I was trying to do with that article. I deliberately use the notion of performing ethnicity because I think Judith Butler’s work has been too easily seen in reductive terms as talking merely about performance. I use Butler’s notion of the performative, which is very much related to speech act theory and Marjorie Garber’s terms where the performance of transvestism, for example, is in relation to a destabilisation of hetero-normativity and of performance in the wider sense of the term. Butler uses discourses on the law, where this is a kind of authoritative speech discourse which to some degree frames and occludes what is possible to perform within such authoritative speech acts. For example, ‘I now pronounce you man and wife’ or the cartoon she uses of the child being held up and the text says ‘it’s a lesbian’. To a certain extent one has to perform what is possible within those frameworks of authoritative speech acts, and to another extent one has to explore what is eclipsed or occluded by those frameworks. One of the things, she suggests, is what is occluded is the heterosexual’s nostalgia for homosexuality. So, using that analogy, I am saying that Demidenko performed the hegemonic culture’s nostalgia for ethnicity. And that is what is lost in the decree, ‘it’s an ethnic’. I was trying to suggest in
those final paragraphs that how one acquires meaning and authority depends both on the ethnic community and the hegemonic community. The judges in the Miles Franklin award give a certain framing and a certain kind of limit of possibilities to ‘it’s an ethnic’ for Demidenko’s book. Whereas the Ukrainian/Australian community wouldn’t say, ‘it’s an ethnic’ in a way, but they would say it is an Ukrainian/Australian book and would give that dimension to it. It is a recognition of a performativity as decreed by whom or which particular group in terms of discourse, and that’s what is at stake here. And there has not been sufficient recognition of those various possibilities by different groups to offer those pronouncements, and that’s a question of legitimation. In other words, we do not hear or we do not institutionally recognise the possibilities for those other kinds of framing of ‘it’s an ethnic’ that come from varieties of ethnic communities. But there has been a way in which ‘ethnics’ throw back at the hegemonic group their own ethnicity, and this does not happen sufficiently. There has been a lot of work that seems to come out of Fine Arts, at least what I am familiar with, around indigenisation — becoming a white indigene — by non-indigenous Australians. It is a way again of legitimating yourself by appropriating, to some degree, or negotiating with indigeneity. That is a recognition of a certain kind of an ethnicity by the dominant group. But it is also a foreclosure and a kind of disavowal. And that is what I see happening again in this emphasis within the Anglo-Celtic hegemonic group: it is in relation to indigeneity and not in relation to the spectrum of ethnicity projected onto other groups. It is a political disavowal. Becoming indigenous or playing with indigeneity comes from non-Anglo-Celtic writers and cultural workers of various kinds. This is where the work of B.Wongan, as a kind of ‘becoming indigenous’, represents a negotiation from a non-Anglo-Celtic perspective. So, for better or worse, that is the dominant focus at the moment and obviously you could multiply that across a range of different cultural groups.

One of the things we haven’t talked about are the differences in the way multiculturalism gets constructed here and this discussion reminded me of it. In Canada (and in North America generally), multiculturalism is a code for racialised differences. It is talked about in relation to what are known as ‘visible differences’ and to some degree the first nations, the indigenous groups. In some ways, because of a certain obvious politics in relation to land rights, in Australia there is an attempt not to attach multiculturalism and various kinds of politics of multiculturalism to indigenous groups. In Australia, multiculturalism is not seen sufficiently in terms of racialised differences, and yet the racialisation goes on in its arbitrary way across European groups — so that the Greeks for example, have always been, in various ways, racialised. In Canada, there is a real healthy suspicion of and scepticism towards multiculturalism because it is seen very much as state-born and constructed. In the seventies, Trudeau brought multicultural policies into play as a way of diffusing Québécois separatism. So here multiculturalism is seen very much as a political measure. And here there is much more talk about it in terms of anti-racism. What we would call multicultural differences in Australia are played out in the arena of anti-racist work of various kinds. This is work that could be very usefully translated into the Australian context, where the arbitrary processes of racialisation have, I think, not been sufficiently brought in as part of discussions of cultural difference.
Spoils of Freedom
Renata Salecl

What is freedom? How do we understand the concept of universal rights in the nation? What are some of the dilemmas of cultural difference? How do we theorise questions of identity and nation in post-socialist countries? These are issues that emerge in the writings of Renata Salecl — sociologist, criminologist, philosopher. Her book, The Spoils of Freedom, uses psychoanalysis and feminism to analyse the fall of socialism. Renata’s recent writing raises politically urgent issues on the rhetoric and ideological forces that shape power and national identity in Eastern European countries and the West. Much of her writing engages with the psychoanalytic work of Jacques Lacan, and the ongoing dialogue with Slavoj Žižek.1

Renata is based in Slovenia, and is a regular visiting scholar at the New School for Social Research in New York. This conversation took place over the telephone from our respective cities — Sydney and Ljubljana, Slovenia in January 1997. We talked about the ways in which language and ideology function; the dilemma of identity and difference; and hate, racism, and the question of love and subjectivity in the nation. I asked Renata about her political history and the theoretical interests that frame her most recent writings.

I

Ideology, Passion, Politics

The political history that frames my work comes from my engagements with Slovenian politics and psychoanalytical movements. In my earliest writings, I was very much influenced by the work of Michel Foucault. However, there were many questions that pertain to the problem of the subject’s identification with power to which I did not find sufficient answer in Foucault. I found Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis much more useful for understanding the logic of subjectivity in contemporary societies, especially in totalitarian regimes. In Slovenia, Lacanian psychoanalytical movements during the time of communism were strongly associated with the oppositional parties. At that time there were two main fronts among the oppositional intellectuals. On the one hand, there were mostly literary writers who were very much concerned with the issue of Slovene national identity. And on the other hand, there were intellectuals who were trying to build the opposition movement on non-nationalist grounds. Theorists who were influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis were among this second group of intellectuals. Lacanian theory helped us to understand why the communist system functioned for so long, although no one believed in it (especially not the top bureaucrats). Psychoanalysis also provided the framework for building up oppositional ideology which was not nationalist, but tried to incorporate the ideas of the new social movements.

1 Associated readings for this conversation include, Renata Salecl ‘The Right Man and The Wrong Woman’ (1992), The Spoils of Freedom — Psychoanalysis and Feminism after the Fall of Socialism (1994), co-edited (with Slavoj Žižek) Gaze and Voice as Love Objects (1996a), ‘See no evil, hear no evil: hate speech and human rights’(1996b) and ‘The silence of feminine jouissance’ (1998a).
Now I am supporting a party which is called the Liberal Democratic Party. This party came out of new social movements like Greenpeace, feminism and so on. It has become a strong party, I wouldn’t say the best party that you could find, but pragmatically in this situation it is the one that I feel is worth supporting. The Party promotes issues that are linked with the socialist movement, and it has now turned into a contemporary centre left party. We have been in power for the last four years, in coalition with the Christian Democrats and the ex-communists. At the moment, there is a big fight in the government because in the last elections (October 1996) there was a complete split in the parliament; the right wing and the left wing got exactly half of the vote. And, only two days ago, one person moved from the right wing to the left-wing side. This allows our party, the Liberal Democrat Party, to get the prime minister. But this also means that any government formed will be pretty much unstable. If there is such a split in the parliament, you cannot rule the country. So, the sad thing about the political situation here is the strong division between right and centre left. Both the political groups promote populist ideas of the nation and justice. For example, you take from the rich to give to the poor. Find people who are guilty for everything and then get rid of them, and you will solve all the problems. They all use this very elementary ideology. And, on the other side, you have a kind of coalition of more leftist parties who are not united but who are struggling to define their leftist position. But the left is not very welcome in the post-socialist scene.

The political options that I support here are perceived from a western perspective as leftist/liberal or, you know, pro-feminist and so on. Although feminism, I have to point out, is a big issue now. Because in the last elections only seven out of the 90 members of parliament were women, so it is only seven or eight percent of the parliament that are women — which is half the number from the previous elections. This is also one of the lowest numbers in Europe, and unfortunately, before the elections there was no way to bring attention to feminist issues. Because, firstly, the parties were sceptical — women are less-known candidates and so on. And, secondly, women themselves don’t vote much for women. I am thus pessimistic about the future role of women in politics, even though, in terms of many western countries, we have good maternity leave and so on. But there are very few women who make it to the top; there are more women at universities and at medium level positions in the government and in the companies and so on, but the top arenas are still very much the male domain. And there are problems related to how women themselves identify with feminist issues or with feminism. Mostly women are critical of feminism, seeing it as kind of anti-feminine stand — women who hate men and that kind of traditional objection.

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In The Spoils of Freedom you write about how ideology operates in post-socialist states and how this links to western liberal thinking. You discuss various liberal democratic ideas and ideals that emerge in post-socialist countries. What seems to emerge are new forms of nationalism, as the right wing takes on 'liberal' speech and uses it to their advantage. How does this ideology and its hidden components structure relations of power?

The hegemonic struggle for power incorporates many different discourses, and right-wing or populist discourses are very successful nowadays in reinterpreting some liberal or leftist ideas. So the right wing in Slovenia incorporate and use liberal ideas which people can identify with, like rights, the freedom to choose, and so on. I would say that they do not differ that much from any western country, but their success, I think, in contrast to liberal or left-wing parties, is that they are able to touch the issues which people passionately identify with, and left wing or liberal discourses are very negligent on this point. For example, the question of maternity leave is a very touchy issue and the left wing don't address it much in their political discussion. But the right wing bring out this dilemma of women struggling on two fronts: being mothers and working women. They appeal to both traditional family values and populist feminist thinking.

In Slovenia, at the moment, we have one of the best conditions of maternity leave in the world. We have one year of fully paid maternity leave and paternity leave, so either a man or a woman can take it. But what the right wing recently tried to promote is the idea that three-year maternity leave would solve all kinds of social problems. Their idea was that they would not push women out of the workforce (which I would say was a hidden agenda behind it), but they would solve the psychological problems of children. The first claim was if children stayed at home for three years they are much happier psychologically than children who go to kindergarten. From a psychoanalytic point of view this is social stupidity. It is well known that too close of a bond between the mother and a child can incite psychosis on the side of the child. The second claim was that they would solve unemployment, because for three years some unemployed people could take the job of the woman who is at home. And they wanted the father to share this responsibility and maybe take a year or whatever out. But it is totally unrealistic because in a patriarchal environment it is not something that a man would really consider doing. So I think what they were doing with this was making an ideological operation by presenting people with certain gifts. But what was crucial in terms of feminism was that they were speaking about women's right to choose: to be either a mother or a career woman. They were taking liberal notions of right and choice and re-incorporating them into a populist discourse. But their idea was that it is a woman's right to be only a mother, and if you have all kinds of rights, this should be a right too. You can stay at home one month with a child if you want, or you can stay three years; you are not forced to, you have a choice. Thus you are not discriminated against if you only want to be a mother. But they were sending a message between the lines: that this is not a neutral choice, it is a choice between good and bad — the good thing is to be
a mother. But they also use the language of ‘a career women’, in such a way that a man has a ‘job’ but a women has a ‘career’. A woman is a careerist, someone who is kind of aggressive, pushy and so on. This notion of choice didn’t work in their favour, because we feminists attacked this proposition. And I think we have somehow enlightened the masses. But people also started being afraid of capitalist production, that you couldn’t be guaranteed that after three years the job would still be there. I think that communism did bring some enlightenment to women, in terms of the fact that women started thinking that they didn’t want to lose their positions and so on. Because with communism we got almost a majority of women fully employed. This still goes on and women are extremely well educated, but unfortunately the power structure is almost completely in the hands of men.

So the right’s success lies in their raising the issues. I think that on the ideological front they are much wiser than left-wing parties, who basically forgot about these ‘passionate’ issues and were thinking more about the economy and so on.

II

Fantasy, Hate, Nation

In terms of a psychoanalytic understanding of nation, you have written about the fantasy structure of the nation; and the nation itself being a kind of a fiction — a fantasy structure. In what ways is the nation a fiction? And how can this notion of fiction enable a claim to identity without becoming a nationalist position?

I would put this in a slightly different way. Nations are not simply a fiction for me. If you take the problem of national identity from a Lacanian perspective, basically there lies an unsymbolisable kernel that you cannot define exactly, but you also can’t simply get rid of. So the nation is that point around which the social symbolic structure organises itself. Here, I would say, that the nation as a national community would be a fiction. But the problem of the nation touches more on the real in the Lacanian sense. This is not simply something that is pre-symbolic but, as I understand it, is the leftover of any kind of symbolisation; that is, a point around which the symbolic structures itself but where the structure also fails. So the national community would be a fantasy structure which tries to somehow deal with this unsymbolisable element of the nation. And this structures, I would say, a story, a fantasy, something that we are telling ourselves or something the community is telling itself, to make a coherent identity. The nation is an ungraspable element that you always need to deal with. Even if you take an anti-nationalist strategy as your political strategy, you are nonetheless dealing in some way with this ungraspable element of the nation — you are not simply annihilating it as a problem. From the left-wing or the liberal position you have to deal with this issue. I am not anti-national but I think that liberal or left-wing politics has to incorporate the problem of national identity in their discourse if they want to be successful in any way. In Slovenia, our point was that you cannot
escape the destiny to be Slovene. We were saying you can be proud to be Slovene but it doesn’t mean that you are against other nations and so on. So our party strategy was also to incorporate the idea of national identity in the political discourse, but not in the kind of aggressive anti-nation, anti-others rhetoric.

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In some recent work I have dealt with the problem of hate speech and racism. I was trying to incorporate psychoanalytic work into this domain. I was primarily asking myself, what are the intentions of a certain percentage of people who use violent, racist or nationalist words against members of other races or nations? What is their intention? What is it the person tries to succeed in? The answer is not that the person simply tries to get rid of a member of another nation or race (because, as you remember from Nazism, the most anti-Semitic feelings were in the Austrian provinces where there were almost no Jews, so it doesn’t matter if the ‘others’ are really there or not). I argue that in psychoanalytic thinking what becomes crucial is that the person who attacks another tries to annihilate the identity of the other, and also tries to get confirmation for their own identity. So, what the person searches for in the other is an addressee who will give back a form of confirmation to the attacker’s identity. I think at that moment the attacker touches the real in the other, and the attacker tries to annihilate the identity of the other. This gives them a certainty and confirmation of their identity. Basically, my problem in the dilemma of this violent speech is how to attend to this logic and how to think about this hostility in regards to an attack. One possible answer to this dilemma is presented in the recent writing of Judith Butler. Butler’s stance is that the subject who utters violent words isn’t really responsible for them, because the subject is quoting from the existing discourses which are racist, nationalist and so on. And doesn’t history itself have to be somehow put on trial and not the individual subject; or isn’t the individual simply a scapegoat whom we perceive as responsible? My answer would be that from this kind of deconstructionist perspective there are problems that relate to a kind of political correctness. They are propagating the idea that one has to be susceptible to changes in discourse, and be careful about the words that one uses and so on. They also claim that everything you utter is already a citation of the subject. On the one hand, you are responsible for changing words, and being politically correct. On the other hand, you are not responsible because you are only quoting from existing historical discourses. I think this is the first deadlock that they come into. The second deadlock is responsibility. From the position of psychoanalysis, what Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis points out is that you are always determined by social symbolic structures. And yes you are quoting from the language that you are born into, but nonetheless there is a certain responsibility that the subject cannot escape. And this responsibility pertains to the enjoyment of a person. For example, Freud takes the study of Dora. Dora was born into a horrible family. Her father was not a very moral person, her mother was also a complicated figure (Mr K and Mrs
K were problematic too). Dora blames the others for her troubles. But, for Freud, what was crucial was her enjoyment, the ways in which she perceived herself as the victim of these circumstances. In the racist attack, the question is: what is the enjoyment of the subject who utters violent speech? Even when the words that they utter are a quotation from past discourses, what is the enjoyment in re-uttering them? My point is that in re-uttering them, the subject does not simply quote from the discourse but re-establishes this discourse in a new way.

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This notion of utterance is crucial in understanding the violence of racism and how it does change. In a slightly different way, in The Spoils of Freedom you write about a ‘postmodern’ racism. How racism has been experienced in, say, the last hundred years or so has changed, and continues to change. It seems to me that this can sometimes escape social and cultural analysis. In Australia we have had a resurgence of racism and people keep saying, ‘oh it’s a return to a 1930s-type racism in this country’. But it’s not. It is not that simple. I think that it is completely different type of racism that is in operation. So I am interested in this notion of ‘postmodern’ racism and how it is produced.

In The Spoils of Freedom I was trying to come to terms with the dilemma of cultural differences and universalism as understood in contemporary theory. My problem here, again, is pointed to in the conclusion of the book and that is, how the West is now engaging in this new form of racism; that is, how other nations are seen as ultimately ‘other’. They are seen as so ‘other’ that they do not understand the same notions, understandings and so on. The debates lately about human rights have been in this direction. Should the West insist that non-western countries understand human rights in the same way as we do? That is the common question. Or should we really oppose other nations when they engage in certain acts, like female circumcision and so on? Unfortunately, I think we use this example too many times, and that raises other questions as to why we do it. But, around this issue, it is very easy to talk about the dilemma of liberals and left-wing intellectuals. They would believe in human rights and would oppose these kind of practices, but there is a problem when we know that, for example, Nigerian women in France who were denied circumcision claimed that they could not get married and that their lives were ruined. So how do we behave when a national culture engages in practices which from the western perspective are perceived as cruel? It is easy to say that other cultures are just different and we oppose them, but there is nothing we can do to convince them not to engage in these practices which are part of their identity. I think there is a dilemma that liberals don’t want to face, which is that you always engage in some kind of violence when you take a stand. And here I will take the example of a recent American debate about Amish culture. Amish people in America decided that they do not want to send their children to public

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2 See Freud Case Histories I — ‘Dora’ and ‘Little Hans’ (1900b[1905][1909]).
schools, because after going to public schools children lost interest in their communities. This became a big problem in American politics, because the basis of the American state is to provide equal education to all children. But the Amish people wanted to have their own schools and this is a certain violation of the right to have equal education. But, nonetheless, the issue of national identities came forward. So what happened in this case was that the Amish were granted the right to not send their children to the public schools and they could create their own schools. For liberals, the problem relates to the fact they usually regard school as a 'neutral ground'. In school, children should be informed about certain aspects of life and after they leave school they will be able to make choices about their identity and so on. In female circumcision, people should be informed about these practices, but if after informing them they still choose the practice, what can we do? What the Amish case showed was there is precisely no neutral ground. The school itself imposes certain ideas which are perceived by the community as violent. So there is a deadlock in terms of this promise of cultural difference. Liberals try to have a comfortable escape in having the idea that they provide people with information, while they don’t want to see the information as already a form of violence. We cannot escape this dilemma of choosing one form of violence against another. In terms of female circumcision, I would definitely choose the violence of imposing universal human rights, but this should not be regarded as a good deed, since it imposes a certain kind of violence on the others.

III

The Dilemmas of Difference

The issue of cultural difference is incredibly prominent, and there seems to be a tension between cultural difference and a notion of universalism or universal rights if you like. In The Spoils of Freedom, you talk about ways of living in a multicultural society through a notion of a Kantian cogito — of a universal cultural ethic. What are the possibilities of living in a ‘multicultural’ culture in terms of negotiating universal rights and issues like this?

First I would claim that I am universalist — I believe cultures are not so different in their understanding of what is universal. Here I agree with some recent writings of Ernesto Laclau. Laclau speaks about the dilemma between the universal and the particular. His position, I think, is close to the Lacanian understanding of this dilemma. That is, basically the universal emerges at the moment in history which comes out of the split of the particular. So there is not a universal and a particular, there are not two opposite positions. Rather, the universal emerges because the particular is already split in itself. I think the universal emerged at the moment that is supposed to cover up the split of the subject. The universal is linked to the lack in the subject, the lack in the particular and even in identity generally. So, for me, the universal is definitely something that is an empty signifier. It is not
that there is no content, but the content can be this or that in different contexts. So the universal is
an ordering function, but the order of the content has multiple meanings. For me, universals like
human rights are never accountable. You can never say exactly what human rights are. We have many
ideas, and we have many written down rights, but the whole notion of rights can never be something
directly pointed out. But what is crucial is the hegemonic battle that goes on for their meaning. For
example, even Milosevic in Serbia believed in human rights, but he understands them in his political
regime in a different way. My point is that a fundamentalist, say in the Middle East or wherever,
would definitely believe in the universal. But they fight for their own different and particular mean-
ing. The West should not limit their understanding of human rights and equality to their own ideals.
But they should understand that the fight for the meaning of what is universal is going on through-
out the world, and that different parts of the world are engaging with it in particular ways. Recently
I came across some debates about Vietnam and Vietnamese intellectuals. The opposition intellectu-
als (to the government) were struck by Westerners saying: 'oh let's not force the Vietnamese gov-
ernment to accept international human rights, because they as an Asian culture have a different
understanding of human rights'. But Vietnamese intellectuals were saying: 'please allow us at least
the use of this weapon — the universal human rights, because this is what is left for us in our battle
against the government; don't become multiculturalist on this domain'. My fear is that western intel-
lectuals can very easily exclude others' claim to 'rights' in their multiculturalist perspective. I think
that this is a very comfortable position, which I perceive as extremely dangerous because the uni-
versal logic of capitalism is playing with this multiculturalism. Multi-capitalist corporations are now
using the language of the left very successfully. When, for example, big corporations came to Eastern
Europe we were hoping that they would bring the western standard of equal opportunity, sexual
equality at the workplace and so on. But they immediately became defenders of cultural differences.
They claimed: 'oh we should not impose this because their culture is different' and we should respect
the other. But I would say capitalism is using multiculturalist ideology for its own purposes. What
you are seeing with these changes is that, basically, capitalist corporations become entities that are
not controlled by anyone; not even western governments control them any more. So what is crucial
is to observe how capitalist corporations now treat their own countries. For example, western coun-
tries are now colonies. It is no longer that the corporations are colonising the East or Third World,
they are colonising the West itself. For example, in Germany big corporations like Siemens are not
controlled any more by the financial institutions in their country. They can decide to move their pro-
duction to another country to increase their profits, and usually they threaten their own government
by saying: 'OK if you are not going to obey us we will move out and you will lose jobs and so on'.
So capitalist logic has changed significantly; you don't have capitalism controlled by a nation state,
but it is the company that is controlling the nation state. This is done precisely by being transna-
tional, and by using multiculturalist ideology.
In Slovenia, multiculturalism is very much present in left-wing circles. It is definitely here, although the politically correct movement is not so strong here. Also, in Serbia the intellectuals who are opposed to Milosevic’s regime would perceive themselves as multiculturalists and so on. But their multiculturalism usually stops when the issue of Albanians in the Serbian province of Kosovo comes through. What is shocking with the developments (now) in Belgrade, is that the students and opposition do not address the issue of Kosovo. So Albanians are the unutterable trauma in Serbia. The intellectuals can oppose Milosevic’s regime, but when it comes to the issue of Albanians most of them are just silent. And my fear is that even if Milosevic’s regime is overturned nothing good will come out of it for the Albanians. In this sense, multiculturalism has limits there.

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IV

Love

In a different way, the question of love is important in relation to questions of nation and identity. In a recent book, co-edited by Slavoj Žižek and yourself, Gaze and Voice as Love Objects, questions of love are touched upon in multiple ways. How do you see love in the nation, peoples’ love for a country and the other side of that, people’s hate?

My next book will be devoted to this very idea of love and hate. I will move from the domain of the political to a more personal arena by analysing movies and so on. What is crucial in love — and that also relates to what you ask about the problem of love in a social setting — is that there are various ways that psychoanalysis understands love. In Lacan’s work he defines a position on what is love and perceives it as a kind of narcissistic identification. But in his later works he moves more to the problem of the desire of the other. In these later writings he moves to the problem of the drive in the other. For me, what is crucial is the last two positions; that is, the problems of the desire and the drive. For Lacan, the main problem the subject deals with is the question of desire of the other. This not only means that I desire what the other desires, but I want to know in what ways the other desires me. What kind of an object am I for the other? Who am I? These are the kinds of questions, let’s say, that ‘normal’ subjects have to deal with all the time. And, for the Lacan of the sixties, this was the most crucial dilemma. But for the Lacan of the seventies, he moves away from this because when you have the logic of desire you are still on the level of the symbolic. Desire is always linked to symbolic law, which means that the subject desires what is prohibited to them. So, in love relationships the idea would be that you desire another person because the other person is also a desiring subject. Lacan, in his seminar on ‘Transference’, deals with this issue very nicely. When he says: ‘Why in Plato’s Symposium was Alchibiades in love with Socrates? Why was Socrates an object of
love?' Lacan's answer is: 'because Socrates was also a desiring subject'. Because Socrates desired knowledge, he was also the subject of lack. But I say one has to go further here, and introduce the problem of jouissance (the Lacanian term for pleasure in displeasure), and the problem of drive. Because my claim is that it is not simply that you are attracted to the other because the other is a desiring subject, but that you are attracted to the other and you also hate the other more because the other enjoys in a special way. Enjoyment and desire have to be distinguished. Desire is always something linked to un-satisfaction. Enjoyment is a point, paradoxically, when the subject is satisfied. Thus, enjoyment linked to drives brings a constant pressure in the subject, which the subject cannot escape. The logic of desire would be: I want this because I cannot have it, and I want it even more because of this. In love relationships, we know very well, that what is prohibited we desire even more and that kind of thing. However, the drive is much more paradoxical because with drive the logic would be: 'I don't want to do this, but I am doing it nonetheless'. It is a pressure that you don't want, and it is this enjoyment that makes you suffer. In this sense, enjoyment is pain.

In some recent writings I have engaged with narratives of music and these questions of love. I ask why, for example, are musicians so fascinating for other people? Why are there so many movies where a man or a woman falls desperately in love with a musician? And in well known movies, like Rhapsody and The Seventh Veil, you have the case where a woman wants her musician lover to decide between the love for music and the love for her. If the musician chooses her she will drop him. But if he chooses music they might also split up, but she will be even more attracted to him. So it is this kind of forced choice where the partner always chooses the wrong thing. But, nonetheless, I would say that this devotion to music can be understood as a kind of jouissance, a certain drive that the subject masters which makes them an attractive object to the other — the Lacanian problem, you know, that there is no sexual relationship because the subject lives always in such a way so that the other cannot compliment you; because when you fall in love you are searching in the other for what the other does not have. Men and women search for different things in each other. And, I would say, the logic of the drive is what attracts us and what brings us together, but also what splits us from ourselves as well as from others; because the subject enjoys in a completely different way, a way which is not understandable to the subject. The subject reaches some point of basic enjoyment in solitude, but this trauma of jouissance is what also opens up the space of intersubjectivity. This can help us to understand why we hate others. We hate others, as I point out in the book, because they have enjoyment. And this also opens up the question of why we love others.

* In your writing, you do not readily collapse the relation between the individual and the social in the notion of love. Some criticisms of psychoanalysis that I've come across are about the ways it concentrates too heavily on individuality or a subject outside of a social arrangement. That is, the notion of a certain 'psychologising' of the subject. But I think that can be a very limited reading of psychoanalysis and ignores what it can
offer critical and cultural theory. What do you think about this particular criticism?

For psychoanalysis, there is an indistinguishable connection between the social and the indi-


gual. Psychoanalysis definitely does not focus on the individual outside of the social setting. What psychoanalysis does not give us is a ground to establish a kind of moral theory. The ethics of psy-


choanalysis is very much against the ethic of a common good. Psychoanalysis finds the biggest dan-

ger in the idea of the common good. And, in this sense, psychoanalysis shouldn’t be understood too quickly as a social theory. I think it is too radical, as it does not give us certain kinds of coherent moral theory that other social theories or political theories usually engage with. So psychoanalysis, I think, disrupts these possibilities. It is more pessimistic than other political theories.

Psychoanalysis should not be too quickly confused with post-structuralism or structuralism. Certainly, the subject is always embedded in the social symbolic structure, determined by it, and so on; and early Lacan would be saying precisely this. But the problem of jouissance and drives brings another angle to it. So the problem is not just that we are born into intersubjective relations and into the social structure. Yes, this is a problem, but not the only one. For me, the problem for psycho-


analysis is: why does the subject engage at all with others? Why does the subject communicate with the other? Especially when the subject who is marked by lack also enjoys, and jouissance, which pri-

marily determines the subject in this way, is not intersubjective in the same way desire is. And here the logic of castration is useful. Castration enables the subject to enter into language and commu-


nicate with others. When the subject undergoes symbolic castration then — only then — will the subject be able to communicate with the other. As we know from the cases of psychotics — for whom, as is well known, the symbolic castration failed to take place — they live in their own world and have almost no need to communicate. They think that they have, for example, a direct connec-


tion with God. In their delirium they are not interested in the desire of the other, and this is how they engage in their intersubjective relations. So only when the subject is marked by lack can this open up the logic of desire. And only then do you have some ground for intersubjectivity.

In the sexual domain I would say that castration gives the ground for sexual encounters among human beings. For animals it is instinctual copulation. Because the human subject is split and is a subject of language, we have lost the ability of animal copulation. To engage in human sexuality one is more interested, let’s say, in the gaze of the other or the voice of the other than the sexual organs or the sexual satisfaction that you will give in a sexual relation. Castration, in this sense, opens up the field of love. One can say animals love human beings, but they are not obsessed with the desires of the other. So a dog can be devoted to his owner, but it is not concerned with the desire of the owner. Humans can love animals more than they love themselves, and this love sometimes emerges because the animal is not a split being like the human subject. That is why animals are much more lovable creatures. Animals have a self-sufficiency that make them attractive. While the human being is split and so lacks that kind of self-sufficiency.
Stories within Stories
Laleen Jayamanne

This conversation began with an anecdote, a story about a story. I met Laleen Jayamanne in September 1996 at the University of Sydney (where she teaches cinema studies). I asked her about a personal anecdote I had recently read: when living in New York a friend had bought a tape recorder and asked her to test it.¹ On hearing the tape back she failed to recognise the voice — it was strange and foreign. This experience became the impetus for the sound track of her film A Song of Ceylon. The anecdote raises the methodological implications of a non-recognition of self. How do we construct identities from an encounter with difference — from a self that becomes foreign, and returns with a different tonality and rhythm?

I asked Laleen about her experience of moving between different languages and cultures and how the ‘non-recognition of self’ intersects with her aesthetic practice and cinematic work.²

In a sense I haven’t moved between languages because of migration, because I grew up bilingual in a Sri Lankan middle-class family that spoke Sinhalese and English. Sinhalese was my mother tongue. But that has completely receded and that happened in Sri Lanka rather than in Australia. I had my primary and secondary education in Sinhalese, but when I went to university I did my undergraduate work in English. When my formative thinking actually began, I had already switched to English. So in some ways there is no trauma or drama around language and immigration for me (though English is referred to as a sword by the Sinhalese-speaking students from rural areas, at the University of Ceylon, but that’s another story), and I have only lived in Anglophone cultures, in America for four years and in Australia for over twenty years. The transitions, linguistically at least, have been very easy because of that. But in terms of the non-linguistic aspects of experiencing a foreign culture there have been difficulties (though I did grow up in a family that loved Hollywood films), but some of those difficulties are also very enabling ones...

The anecdote about the tape recorder happened after about three years of living in America, when my first lover bought a tape recorder and recorded my voice. When I heard my voice it was the most shocking experience... Maybe it was not a very good tape recorder — it might have distorted my voice! But this experience dramatised in an instant everything I felt. My basic sense of

¹ This anecdote appears as a footnote to Laleen Jayamanne’s article “Love me tender, love me true, never let me go...” A Sri Lankan reading of Tracey Moffatt’s Night Cries — A Rural Tragedy’ (1993).
destabilisation hit me hard. In fact, the tape-recorded voice echoed my sense of my self being taken apart, and the parallel to this was my experience at graduate school in New York. I went to City College in Harlem, at first, with very little money (enough to pay for a semester to do graduate study in drama) and I was on my own in New York. I was 23 becoming 24 and it was an absolute severance from Sri Lanka. I knew I would never go back. No-one else knew this. My family expected me to come back with a PhD. But just finding one’s feet in New York is hard (even for an American who is not a New Yorker). So for someone who went from a small-scale city like Colombo to a major metropolis, there was a terrible sense of dislocation: no family, friends... and the school I was at didn’t offer the intellectual sustenance that I found as an undergraduate in Ceylon, and later in Australian academic life. So there was dislocation at an intellectual level as well, and the process of re-orientation was really through the performance work that I did outside the university. And some of this work had to do with sexuality, my body — deformed spine and all — recovering from my first sexual experiences, all of which threw me into a kind of relentless flux.

When I first went to New York I was fairly articulate — I had no problem with talking and speech. I was also a fairly articulate person in Ceylon. But as I continued to go through graduate school I became systematically aphasic, to the point that I could not speak at all. I mean technically I was not diagnosed as being aphasic, but I would certainly call it an experience of aphasia. It had something to do with my experience of sexuality. The fact that I was in love with the person that did the tape recording (I eventually got married to him to get a green card and visa), and that we went through graduate school together, and he was extremely articulate — all those things enmeshed and created this effect which then made me go silent. But despite this aphasia or perhaps because of it, whenever I kissed him I did have a strong impulse to bite him instead, which, being the nice girl that I was, I didn’t give into. I like this memory of an oral rage, which is perhaps one of the reasons why I was attracted to the mad woman Somawathi who was the subject of a film we made much later in Australia.

One of the things Sri Lankans who went overseas were told in the early days was that the minute they get onto a ship they changed their accents. We were considered very fickle in the sense that we take on other accents. There was a mild feeling of betrayal among Sri Lankans that lose their real Sri Lankan accent; people think, ‘oh how silly can you get?’ But to me it is an enabling condition. However, I am shocked when I hear my original intonations come back to me. Like when I heard the radio interview I did on Jackie Chan last Saturday. I thought, ‘my God it’s so Colomboish!’ I couldn’t bear it. So however much one tries to change it, or it changes unconsciously, sometimes, if one is unaware, something else comes up. And so I became very conscious of how mimetic traces can be carried through the body in different ways; marked by the different zones that one’s voice and body have gone through. I got interested in how one can reanimate them more or less self-consciously.
In a sense, my film A Song of Ceylon tried to carry these different traces of the body — migratory emission. We had to also find the right kind of voice and tonality for the voice of the mad woman Somawathi — the hysterical, possessed woman, who is marked by her oral rage. We tried lots of different kinds of voices. First we all wanted it to be like a Bretonian non-inflected style of voice, but it didn’t work. What she was narrating couldn’t be said in that kind of monotone — in a non-expressive way. It had to become more and more hyper-theatrical — we had to stretch words and distort them. And to also find pleasure in the movement of the glottis, the mouth, oral rage had to come through in the use of the voice. Not through just screaming or anything like that, but using the voice in a range of possible ways.

...I guess theatre has been the way I negotiated New York. In a sense, I went looking for a certain kind of theatre which didn’t exist, or if it did it wasn’t the kind of theatre I was exposed to. What I found was performance at the very limits (or even beyond) of what my idea of performance was, and that was also a way of redefining subjectivity and the other parameters of performance, like space, time and objects. One performance that enabled this redefinition was set in my apartment. For a whole month in April 1975 (a little before I left the US), I invited special people (friends, my university professors, Richard Schechner and Michael Kirby and so on), to come to my apartment very late at night. At that time, I lived in the lower east side on 3rd Street between 1st and 2nd Avenue, right opposite the Hell’s Angels with a totem pole at the entrance to the building, so only the very brave would come there at 10pm! It was one of those old railroad apartments and the bathtub was in the kitchen, the audience would be seated on the floor waiting for me near the bathtub. When people asked, ‘where is Laleen?’, my friend was asked to say, ‘she’s in hot water’, which was true, as I was soaking in the tub with the metal lid on it. I would open the lid with a big bang, appear with my eyes blindfolded and have a kind of mask on my face made with a piece of orange in my mouth which I was sucking and then I did a ‘dance’ naked, outside the bathtub, which worked with my hunched back. I then got dressed and climbed out of the window and went for a walk, and it seems the guests had tea and left; the dearest hung around till I came back after an hour or so, and that was the end of the performance. Since then I have never wanted to see theatre or be involved in theatre. It was a kind of exorcism for me, I knew that it was acceptable as a kind of theatrical gesture, and a farewell gesture — but it was also a rite of passage for me. It was a sort of narcissistic constitution of the self. I feel New York offered me these people, these friends, these professionals that helped a certain kind of performance of narcissism. Not narcissistic performance. I mean there was that too of course, but in a more profound way narcissism is about subjectivity and self-constitution in the Freudian sense of narcissism, and the narcissistic ego. For me this performance of narcissism was about how one reconstitutes the self from a kind of a void. On one night when I climbed out of the window and was on the outside wall trying to get down, a nice neighbour yelled abuse at me for doing this odd thing every night on the wall and called the cops, and several huge cops from the 5th
Street precinct came over in no time and seemed mildly amused when I told them what I was doing. You see, the MA in drama that I paid thousands of dollars to get by busting my ass off cleaning houses and babysitting was largely about Euro-American avant-garde performance so the presence of the cops was really just right.

Coming from New York to Sydney, I stayed a few days in Paris with friends when I got a telegram there saying my mother had died. I flew back to Sri Lanka and arrived the day after her funeral. For me, this was a key turning point in the recognition that time is irreversible. We all know that, but you don’t realise it until it hits you in that kind of brutal way. When I left Sri Lanka I knew very clearly that I couldn’t live there, and when I came to Australia it was easier. I had decided to go back to university and study film. I deliberately chose to study femininity in Sri Lankan cinema, and that provided me with some relinking with Sri Lankan culture. In a sense this relinking was via one of the most devalued aspects of the culture, because it is not a very good cinema (with some important exceptions) and it doesn’t have the same status as Indian cinema. It’s like a poor degraded copy of Indian cinema. For me, there was something really important about studying femininity in the Sri Lankan cinema, and that gave me a reason to go back. But I feel much stranger there than I ever did here, or I ever did in America.

*How did your work on Sri Lankan cinema enable you to relink and to redefine yourself? What does that strangeness mean — feeling stranger in Sri Lanka than Australia in terms of self-definition?*

It is a nice feeling. I like the discomfort of it. The feeling that you don’t quite belong is thoroughly enabling because it makes you do things that someone who is absolutely of the culture may not feel able to do for fear of appearing a fool or whatever. When I do something which I think is rash publicly, I find that being foreign gives me a certain licence, a licence given just as much by the permissiveness of the culture. And it is not a sense of debilitation. I have said somewhere else that I have straddled two different kinds of cultures with a tolerable degree of discomfort, and that is a kind of discomfort that really I like.

As for relinking with Sri Lanka through the study of cinema, I must tell you an anecdote. For my PhD thesis I watched over a hundred films. Every morning I would get up at nine o’clock and go to cinema to watch these films until five or six. These were films that I saw as a child. But by the time I went back to study these films, I had already been influenced by film theory on the representation of woman, the patriarchal determination of the woman’s image and so on. What I found fascinating in an unconscious way was how I was taking on some of the kinetic attributes of femininity from the images I was watching: their movements which were often kind of absurd or certainly not acceptable to me kinetically, a way of looking, a way of sitting, a way of moving that caught femininity in a very particular cultural form. And I found myself kinetically recoding myself in this way. And I who thought myself so reflexive about my own culture! I was shocked at that. But I was also
pleased that I was still kind of mimetically alive. Because I want cinema to do that. I think that’s what cinema is about, at least in part.

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II

Recoding the Body

Cinema involves a kind of recoding of the body and image, and this links to what you were saying about mimetic traces and the reactivisation of cultural habits and memory through the body. How does this notion of the body and mimesis work in your aesthetic practice?

For me mimesis has become a really major concept, an essential one. It is not just a concept — as Alexander Garcia Duttmun said, it is almost not a concept because its determinants are so multiple. Mimesis doesn’t seem to have the clarity that you associate with a philosophical concept. I really like that. I’m not talking about mimesis in the Platonic tradition, but rather how Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno theorise it. Benjamin’s essay on mimesis is called ‘The Mimetic Faculty’. Benjamin described mimesis as a capacity to see correspondences between different things. He also said it is a compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else. In many ways, I believe that teaching has a kind of mimetic dimension to it, and that there is an erotics to pedagogy. Teaching is not simply about a sender/receiver model. Knowledge is not anyone’s possession, rather it circulates: its origins and its determinant are multiple. In this sense, subject and object are not clear-cut positions at some moments in the pedagogic process. As a teacher this becomes a reality, but teaching and writing about cinema, it becomes doubly so.

Mimesis is also a sort of madness-inducing concept. So you get into a kind of mimetic frenzy and begin to see correspondences between absolutely incommensurable things. Because the academic brief is a rational one, where you have to argue with a kind of logical system, I like the tension between that kind of mad capacity to see correspondence between things that seem so completely unconnected. And, as Benjamin says, that happens in a flash. This happens when you work on a film. Sometimes you drift off to sleep and suddenly a connection gets sparked off. No amount of sitting and working out will ever release that sort of flash. But then that flash has to be worked on in a different modality in analytical language, and that’s what it is like for me.

The notion of mimesis is also related for Benjamin with child’s play (Benjamin says that child’s play is permeated by mimetic behaviour) and this is interesting to me as a mother. For Benjamin and Adorno, the child, the primitive body and the clown are key figures that emblematise mimesis. The clown seems to be like the child; it doesn’t speak, just like the pre-linguistic child and it has got a motor ability like the toddler, but also a kind of simulated sense of motor retardation and
a kind of sensory ability to put things together in strange configurations. And if you think of cinematic clowns like Chaplin, they are mimetically alive bodies. So before I knew about mimesis as a concept, my child interested me in a mimetic sense. But what I think the notion of mimesis brings is a break from the mirroring effect of the dyadic relationship between mother and daughter. This, one hopes, could minimise the rich potential for violence in this relationship. If this relationship is not a mirror relation then it has the chance to become something else, something less fraught and sad and dreary.

The notion of mimesis offers then another dynamic to the mother/child dyad that is not based on a mirroring and narcissistic relationship. I have been writing a lot lately on narcissism in terms of the maternal imaginary, to gratify this narcissism in a banal sense, and also to expose the analytical implications of this banality in a more profound sense as well. I’m interested in that because it’s thoroughly depleted, or if it’s got a plenitude then it is in the work such as Julia Kristeva did on Bellini and the great painters, and their investment in the maternal. The great figures of the avant-garde privileged the figure of the maternal as well, and what a maternal imaginary might be, but what a fiction of that might be for women is an aspect that is not so clear. So I am interested in that and also the narcissism of the figure of the little girl. I’m interested in that because I have a daughter, but also because she is a privileged figure in philosophy. But we don’t yet know what a little girl can do and it is a figure we cannot abandon. The Melbourne based film-maker Marie Craven is working on the figure of the girl. I think that sort of work is really important. Because the figure of the girl is such an enabling figure — she’s not burdened by being a woman and yet she is not quite like an infant. She is an interesting figure to think about and think with.

When I see my child I want to be surprised by her. I don’t want her to be a mirror image of me at all in that sense — I don’t want to see myself in her. I want to see something that completely startles and surprises me. And that in some ways is a mimetic relationship. Mimesis is not narcissistic gaze of one’s own image. In the Benjaminian and Adorno tradition mimesis is about the production of difference, and for me the child is like absolutely wow — this strange figure who is not yet like us. I want to maintain that part of the erotics of the child, that sense of a different kind of body, a different way of putting things together, a different way of speaking — all of that which will soon go. Every now and then I say silently, ‘Where have you come from?’ and I imagine her saying, ‘From the other side of time, to find you’.

* 

The work I have previously done on the maternal image was prior to my encounter with the notion of mimesis. That is not to say I didn’t have some intuitive sense of it, as most of us do. When I look at some of the work I had done before I became a mother, presumably I was not interested in
the question of motherhood or maternal perception. But I did something called, ‘Mother’s Memories, Other’s Memories’ for a project that Vivien Binns did in New South Wales in the seventies. Catriona Moore wrote about that piece as exploring something to do with that maternal and I had never thought about it quite like that. I then did write a little book called Prodigal Daughters with Sheilah Steinberg, a friend of mine in New York, and you can’t talk about the daughter without some image of the maternal. But if it was there, it was not the main focus of it. I became interested in this more thoroughly having become a mother at forty, and having experienced that absolutely horrible kind of social and cultural alienation. For a woman, like myself, who has been in the public domain, working and so on, that first year without work, on maternity leave alone with the child, was very isolating. This experience is socially degrading in the sense that you can’t engage with anything else. Around this time the Dissonance project asked if I would do something for it, and I felt that the only thing I could do was something around this child — in terms of time available, energy and issues to do with desire. It seems a kind of wanky and an auto-erotic thing to do, to get public funding to make a film about your own child — what is the sort of legitimacy of this etc. But it was an important thing to do to get my self out of a hole. So I made the video Row, Row, Row Your Boat. I cut in images that I had of my daughter. I had taken three shots of sequences, of gestures, movements, of banal things, and I wanted to do something with that. So I tried to formalise it and I intercut those sequences with some other footage from a film by Michael Powell called Thief of Baghdad. When we were editing the film, the Iraq war broke out. So I filmed some warships and intercut that into the footage. This seemed to give some weighty relation to the kind of absolute sense of indulgence that one might feel in working with the image of one’s own child. Those marvellous fairy tale lines, ‘where have you come from? From the other side of time, to find you’, are from this Powell film, words spoken by the prince and princess.

When I was asked to write about that piece I became aware that this was a maternal fantasy about a child’s entry into some kind of an imaginary and into a symbolic. That’s the only way I can put it. If you look at Indian cinema the maternal is a very powerful figure. But it gets depicted in terms of the male child: the relations between the son and the mother. The girl child never figures in this highly charged manner. I was interested in thinking about this, because the maternal imaginary in relation to the daughter is really absent in culture. But I wanted to think about this not in a kind of narcissistic mirror relationship, because I felt that on the one hand you had something like Mary Kelly’s work as a modernist — a very formalist, elegant distanced work — and on the other hand we had feminist work in Australia that dealt with the mother/daughter relations but in a kind of romantic anarchist way, in a way that I find aesthetically embarrassing; it is a kind of aesthetic that is sticky.
Cinematic Memory

What are the implications of aesthetics that deal with historical and political violence? I want to ask about the article you wrote on Tracey Moffatt called “Love me tender, love me true, never let me go...” A Sri Lankan reading of Tracey Moffatt’s Night Cries — A Rural Tragedy. Moffatt’s film, Night Cries, operates at different levels, and it deals with a range of different relations: mother/daughter, the violence of black/white history in Australia, memory and everyday experiences of longing. In this article you write about positioning yourself — as a Sri Lankan reader of this film. This poses interesting questions about ‘what is this relationship?’ in the cultural/political context of Moffatt’s work, and the politics of reading an indigenous woman’s text. How does this relationship of being foreign and reading an indigenous text offer the space for writing a different kind of aesthetics and politics of difference?

I have no trouble writing on say Chantale Ackerman’s work (she is a Belgian woman film-maker) or Hollywood films, but when it came to Tracey’s film, because she is an Australian Aboriginal woman film-maker, I really baulked at it. I felt I could not review it without doing a huge amount of historical research. I didn’t know much about Aboriginal history, and the major parts that I know I’ve learnt from Tracey’s films. So I felt I would have to go into the archive and then I would never re-emerge to review this short film! So I was anxious about this, and I thought I would have to read Eric Michaels, and all sorts of important work. But then Meaghan Morris said ‘well you are not Eric Michaels so why don’t you do a Sri Lankan reading’. And that immediately freed me from this feeling that I had to do endless research, learn history and politics which I usually don’t do when I review a film. But then I had to ask: what the hell is a Sri Lankan reading? There is no such thing. I mean there isn’t a genre of ‘Sri Lankan’ reading. So this was like an enabling fiction. It immediately meant that I am a foreigner, I am not Australian, I am not Aboriginal. So if I am a foreigner how can I approach this film, and what does it mean to approach the film from the outside? From these questions things began to flow. But I also felt that the film itself was an odd object. It didn’t sit in a proper category, it broke certain expectations: it was a short film shot on 35 mm, it was on the cusp of white/black relationships, but not made in a documentary style. It had a very glossy style and colour to it. And, within its funding framework, no low budget Australian film has looked like that. In fact, this point was really brought home to me when Yvonne Rainer, the New York film-maker, saw it and preferred Tracey’s first film Nice Coloured Girls. Because to a New York avant-garde film-maker high gloss is Hollywood, Hollywood, Hollywood! And it’s tainted. Whereas for an Australian independent film-maker to make a low-production film would immediately circumscribe her exhibition outlets, but the look of that film and its kind of ambition took it to where it went and gave it that sort of high profile — it was an amazing tactical move as much as it was aesthetically. So I was able to develop and work with this kind of oddity and foreignness about the film as well.
The film really urges one to work out who the figure of Jimmy Little is. That was the puzzle I was trying to work through in the article. Ingrid Perez had reviewed the film beautifully in terms of the landscape and the links to Australian Aboriginal painting, but she absolutely never once mentioned Jimmy Little. I wondered why. How can you ignore this figure who is structurally central to the film, and then after noting that, how does one approach it, because there is no narrative logic to his presence, there is some other logic. At the time, I called it an aesthetic of assimilation, but I would now see that figure very much as a mimetic figure. I didn’t have the concept then, I was groping for it. But assimilation seemed useful because there is a history of forced assimilation, so how do you turn something that is so violent into something enabling? How can you draw effects from something that seems to have only one effect? A student of mine pointed this out to me when we showed Chauvel’s 1950’s film *Jedda* and *Night Cries* together; *Jedda* has Marbuk the tribal Aboriginal figure and Jimmy Little is the perfectly assimilated Aboriginal. The way Moffat brings together and animates this figure creates a sense of correspondence — a gestural set of correspondences between Marbuk and Jimmy. Marbuk does a mesmerising dance with his body and hands in *Jedda*, and the way Moffatt cuts those very puzzling close shots of Jimmy Little’s hands is, I think, a mimetic relation. And through the figure of Jimmy Little the film operates through a different strata of memory. Little is like a fossil from a particular period, in the sense of a fossil being like a discarded commodity — not at the cutting edge of popular culture like Elvis or anyone like that. In a way, Jimmy Little is a really daggy kind of a figure singing a hit song (the song he sings, ‘Royal Telephone’, was number one on the pop charts in 1964), but she chooses to bring him into the film, and then reanimate him. It’s this kind of radioactive energy that makes the other drama articulatable. There are also a series of mimetic correspondences to Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira. The colour of her film is like the colour of Namatjira’s paintings, and her use of cinematic relations depicts Namatjira’s whole history. Namatjira had a moment of fame (like Jimmy Little’s hit song) and then it was downhill; he commits suicide in a sense, because he dies of alcoholism. This is a bit like the actor who played Marbuk. So there are a whole network of cultural memories mobilised and a series of correspondences drawn between them.

I think Moffatt’s work with memory, and its ‘mimetic qualities’, introduces Australian culture to the importance of other histories and modes of storytelling. In a recent review article ‘Unthinking Multiculturalism’ you write about the importance of different modes of storytelling. In this piece you argue we need a concept of memory that isn’t about psychological fixation, we need to rethink ‘memory as a practice through the act of storytelling’. How does this concept of memory function in relation to different acts of storytelling?

I can’t talk in general. What I am really trying to articulate is what Deleuze says is the function of memory, that is, the power of the false. So it is not simply about autobiographical memory. Deleuze speaks about the different strata of an image, strata not just as a geological spatial image but
as the buried layers of the present as it were (now I think even Mr Howard our prime minister ought to be able to understand this image of history). That is one really good way to think about Moffatt’s films. She is talking about the present, but by unearthing the hidden strata that link up with the present and make transformation in the present possible. Memory becomes this inventive capacity, it is not just telling it the way it really was. But it is a profound dislocation of the image, and a recombination of images through irrational cuts (that’s a term from Deleuze as well). That is why Jimmy Little is ignored, because you can’t narrativise him. And if you say what that film is about, you can say that there are two women, one is looking after the other, they seem to be mother and daughter. But Jimmy Little does not make narrative sense. He is a sort of ghost from the past, a fossil, a shard of popular culture that is there for a second and gone. But Moffatt refuses to forget him, and reanimates him in a kind a complex affect. If there is nostalgia, it is a very special kind of nostalgia.

This notion of nostalgia could be similar to what Raul Ruiz says about the Portuguese word called ‘shaudade’ — nostalgia for something that never was. When he returned to Chile after ten years of exile he was asked how did he feel, and he said he felt like returning from the dead. He said it’s ‘shaudade’. It is a nostalgia for something that was not there and you are glad that it was never there; it is like a paradoxical relation to the past. In the film, when Jimmy Little sings some people feel that Moffatt’s laughing at him or something like that. But it is a much more complicated set of affects going on with the body, the face, the gestures, than just parody and it is something tied up with nostalgia. Nostalgia not as a backward turning move, but a turning back so as to negotiate something else.

Tracey’s films deals with a violent history without reproducing the violence — in a brilliant way, by not making an action image but more like a memory image, what Deleuze would call an optical and sound image of the event or what is left after everything has been said and everything has been done that can’t be reduced to the actions. And it’s like the residue of Charles Chauvel’s film *Jedda*, which is an action film based on a kind of Hollywood model of action with goodies and baddies, and Moffatt converts that into a memory as a series of visual descriptions and sound descriptions rather than actions.

That is something you have called an ‘aesthetics of assimilation’, but now you talk about it through a notion of *mimesis*. Moffatt’s aesthetic practice suggests many different kinds of cultural readings through the complex visual (and sound) layering of her work, and the emotional depth explored. Her work can be positioned historically in an Australian context, but her work goes beyond that; there are other types of readings and cultural identifications that can be made.

Apparently in America when the film was shown people didn’t know about the history and they read the film more as about a mother/daughter relationship. You could take it at that level and respond to it, because there is a reversal between the carer and the cared for. It is not representing the violence, but in retrospect it seems to me that *Night Cries* is a film of reconciliation. It was made
prior to actual institutional formulation of the process. It is a film that doesn’t polarise, rather it creates so many strata of complicated memories linked to the desert, the mother/daughter, Namatjira, Jimmy Little, and so on. Deleuze describes this not as an archaeology of the past but, as I mentioned before, the buried layers of the present. Moffatt’s aesthetic work makes linkages across these abysses, they are like the blind space between each strata — like terror between each of them in terms of affect. We have just this year registered this trauma in the mass media in Australia with the release of the Stolen Generation Report. Tracey’s film first taught me about this aspect of Australia’s assimilation policy in a highly charged way. And there is a sense of terror in watching Tracey’s films. It is like a horror film, because of the typeface, the scream and so on. There are tropes of horror played throughout her work which is very violent, but it is very interestingly done so that there is no polarisation into black/white. It is an inventive film in its practice of memory.

When we talk about memory, the question of ‘time’ is important. Deleuze talks about time as ‘duration’. The representation of time is generally through a kind of linear and sequential logic, but the notion of time as duration offers a different conception of image, space and time — the different ‘strata’ or co-existence that cut across different cultural memories. How do you think this idea of time and duration could provide a way of re-representing cultural histories through images?

The notion of co-existence is not succession in time of past, present and future in that kind of sequence, it is co-existence in time which suggests a different kind of ordering. So what is kept as separate, as belonging to other strata, can be linkable through some sort of strategy within the present. So that would be coexistence and a different kind of ordering of memory. That involves the act of creating the power of the false. This is what Deleuze calls it. Memory is not simply a recounting of what happened, but it is the capacity to invent in some way. I can only talk about that in terms of particular films, because as a general proposition I can’t.

Post-colonial and feminist theories could use the notion of coexistence — so memories and existence are not reduced to one layer of meaning or identity. The idea of ‘coexistence’, I think, offers a transformative quality to analysing and engaging with cinematic texts, theoretical texts, but also, in a sense, the construction of subjectivity...

It is easy to talk about this in cinema because in a way it is part of a globalising visual economy. But I am wondering if I can come at this by thinking of Jackie Chan and what he does. I’m not sure if that is what you are getting at. When Jackie Chan takes on Bruce Lee’s mantle he makes a point to say when someone asks, ‘what do you do?’ and he says, ‘Kung Fu’, and then they say, ‘Ah, Bruce Lee’ and he says: ‘no I’m different’. He is different because he inserts slapstick into Kung Fu. So it is about tradition or renovation of tradition, or, to put it another way, how tradition can be negotiated in modernity in terms of cinema. There is this imperative to renovate, so you can’t continue to be Bruce Lee. I mean Jackie Chan’s training was in comedy at the Peking Opera School, and he takes on what he has seen in western cinema, a sort of a global image of slapstick. And in some
ways the early silent comedians like Chaplin were truly universal figures. Those images circulated right through the world because it was silent in a sense. It was like a real utopian moment in the history of cinema. Chaplin was the first really big star in an international sense. Chaplin had these huge world tours and all the major politicians thought it necessary to meet him. He was that sort of figure. This is the figure that Jackie Chan takes on; it is that tradition he takes to renew his own. So there is a sense of cultural exchange and renewal that travels across those boundaries, and it is also related to the question of technology. The great slapstick tradition is related to the first period of modernity. It is that of man and machine, and you can see the whole history of American comedy in relation to the development of technology. The slapstick comedian can’t survive in a pristine form in the technological field any longer. In a paper on Chan and Chaplin, I argue how it is a mimetic body (which Benjamin and others have shown us) of the machine and Chaplin that correspond. Because that is the big object that Chaplin is up against. Chaplin lets that shock experience of the machine, of modern temporality, to enter the body and fragment it, and he performs that sort of fragmentation for us. Benjamin says everything is like hacked, hewn to pieces, and Chaplin then recombines and reconfigures this by maintaining the fragmentation of the body. Chaplin’s walk itself is thoroughly fragmented — he is going forward while he is going sideways, and all of that. Similarly Jackie Chan seems to be doing this in the film The Drunken Master, where he inserts seven drunken techniques into his action technique. What happens is a series of impulses thrown into the middle of this action projector. And that really throws the professional killer that he is combating. It is like some vital impulse of the body that throws the energy that is going into this mimetic projector. Chan confuses it, he shatters that kind of move by this interference, which is an interference of the body. Chan is aware that his tradition has an end in sight. Because he says audiences are liking Hollywood action cinema, it is more accessible to people through cable TV, satellite television and so on. He is aware that time is running out very fast, because of the special-effects-driven cinema that is fascinating more and more people. But also because his body is getting old, and all of that comes into it when considering the notion of temporality and coexistence.

IV

Becoming Foreign?

You have written on Pauline Chan’s film The Space Between the Door and the Floor, and through a different temporality and ‘spacing’, if you like, she uses stereotypes to reinvent various forms of cultural representation. There is a link that Audrey Yue makes between Pauline Chan and your films, and it is around a notion of post-ethnicity or becoming Asian-Australian through the process of mimesis. You take up this notion of ‘post-ethnicity’ and the mimetic function. How might this relationship enable a reinvention of stereotypes

3 See Audrey Yue “‘I Am Like You, I Am different’ Beyond Ethnicity, Becoming Asian Australian’ (1993).

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or a ‘becoming foreign’?

It is easier to answer in terms of Chan’s work. It is clear the way she takes very saturated images and then places them in sequences through a kind of irrational edit point or a duration of a shot or something the character says. It is a kind of an eroticisation of the figure that is not subject to ridicule, but most of the figures she works with are stereotypes of a kind of Australian ‘ocker’ imaginary. But she does it with a kind of a tenderness or a touch of curiosity. These affective inflections make them more appealing and different...

I don’t set out to make myself foreign, but one finds one’s self suddenly unrecognisable! But you can also find yourself being recognised when you don’t want to be. I mean when I went back to Sri Lanka after four years in New York, I met a school friend at the airport and she said, ‘Oh hello Shiranthi’. She knew me as Shiranthi, my school name, and I was so bitterly disappointed that she could recognise me. Because I had changed beyond belief and beyond recognition (or so I thought). My family registered this and my sister said, ‘you are not the person I knew’. There are all these kinds of changes, but then physically you still are the same! That is when I really wish I could change myself, but that’s a very hard one, you have to be a star to be able to do that. But you discover through the work you do, and through different engagements with theory and so on, how you become something else. But whether there is any sort of model for behaviour or anything like that, I don’t know. Except that in a teaching situation, which becomes a highly ritualised and coded thing, I hope that there are these mimetic moments (that I spoke about) which are the moments when one becomes something else.

I guess that’s what I am trying to get at, that becoming foreign enables something else, and it is not just about being foreign.

It is about not fetishising foreignness. It entails several terms I suppose; if it is in the teaching there is an object that one is working with and another person or a student. I think potentially that kind of thing must transform the nature of knowledge and how we speak about it. Similarly with the mother/daughter relationship you have a role and a cultural stereotype that you live with, and what is interesting is how that changes and transforms. But also how it is maintained. Like the child who doesn’t want to become like you. For example, my daughter says sometimes, if I sit in a particular way in school, ‘don’t do that’ — because they want you to be like the mother, you need to conform to particular protocols of what they see as proper behaviour. I remember taking her to a conference in New Zealand where two of the films I had made in New York were shown (one was of the performance I described, called Works in Regress) and in both of them I was naked. My daughter was appalled; she said, ‘that is so embarrassing!’ She was really upset by this and I found that fascinating. This is not really connected with what you are asking, but it is kind of very odd for me. I can see that if my parents had seen that before they died, they would have died! I have shown it in Australia in a performance context and that was fine, but then you have a very strange take on your
own constitution of yourself through performance. So it is like that moment when the stereotype breaks, it enables something. You engage in a certain structure of interaction and I think when that changes those fixed positions or stereotypes you live with, it enables something else to happen. But it is difficult to determine what exactly will happen.

*I think that the transformation of knowledge is vital in producing other ways of speaking about identity, and the idea of becoming or becoming something else seems to enable that kind of movement.*

In a way, in some post-colonial theory, objects are looked at through a limited grid. People go with absolute certainty like watchdogs and police things. When I borrowed that term ‘post-ethnicity’ from Audrey Yue there was an article written attacking me for using it. There is a policing protocol where objects have to be policed, and maybe some people have to perform it. I find that the least enabling move, if one is interested in some kind of cultural dynamic. In a sense, that is why Tracey’s films cross over this, and the hideous violence. If you can’t think of that kind of crossing over after that history, you are just continually creating blocked discourses. It is not a productive activity and it is like a constant negative charge; it’s a sure way to deactivate a libidinal mimetic impulse.

I find it deadening when post-colonial reading of images is so sure of what it will see. The notion of mimetic mode, where you are open to an encounter, where you don’t quite know what will happen, I think offers a new direction. You have to go with the feeling that you don’t quite know what an object or a study is going to give you. I mean you can easily laugh at that by saying we endlessly want to be surprised and entertained (I mean it has that too), but if we can’t be surprised by something, we always already know everything beforehand. And it is funny that post-colonial theory should practise that kind of move. But then it is much harder to think the other way. There has to be some kind of imperative to develop concepts or make concepts work, and not to use them as authority or repositories of knowledge or something like that. Just as aesthetics works, it seems to me that concepts need to be put to work. As a lapsed fervent Roman Catholic I have sworn not to use mimesis in vain. Methodologically, if I am going to churn out more of the same by using the concept, I think I should shut up. The access to the aesthetic which mimesis offers like a gift invites an openness to the presented thing. As a film critic this is a predisposition I try to cultivate.
Out of Bounds: Inauthentic Spaces and the Production of Identities
Ien Ang

Out of Bounds explores the inauthentic and 'in-between' spaces that produce identities. I met Ien Ang (Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean) in November 1996, to talk about the movement and production of identity, and the politics of experience. Ien’s most recent writings, and her article 'On Not Speaking Chinese' look at the complexities of Chinese diaspora and the politics of autobiography. We talked about the ambivalence of cultural identification and the in-between spaces of foreign life. What are the cultural and political implications of these experiences? How do critical and cultural practices address the ambivalence of cultural identification? How can feminist and cultural politics engage with the complexities of cultural identity and national belonging?

I asked Ien about her experience of ‘not speaking Chinese’ and how this has produced her identity across a range of histories and life experience.

‘On Not Speaking Chinese...’

I was born in Indonesia and I remember that as a small child I was made aware that I was Chinese. In the Indonesian context, being Chinese was difficult because of real and perceived discrimination against the Chinese. You become aware of being Chinese and being part of a minority, and I didn’t like that at all! I didn’t want to be a member of a minority. I didn’t want to be Chinese. There was a whole process of denial, and the ability to deny was something that produced me in particular ways. But, of course, it is never completely possible to deny your identity. I think that is how self-hatred comes about — people hating who they are or how they find themselves in a situation. This experience of self-hatred is prominent in a lot of Jewish literature. And I think it relates to an experience where you are constructed as a foreigner or a stranger, and as not an accepted member of the community. But people who are positioned as ‘foreign’ develop all kinds of strategies to deal with it — some people will try to deny their foreignness, and self-hatred is part of this, or they will try to assimilate into the dominant culture as much as possible. This process of assimilation is certainly one of the trajectories of my family.

My mother bore the burden of being Chinese, and of being a member of a minority. My mother really wanted us to assimilate. When I was a child my sister and I wanted to learn Chinese

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(my mother speaks Chinese) but she said, 'no I don't want you to speak Chinese because that will only make you stand out more and be more vulnerable'. So it was her choice that we shouldn't speak Chinese. Not being able to speak Chinese has a strong resonance with my own history and the construction of my identity.

I wrote my article, 'On Not Speaking Chinese', because I wanted to problematise what it means to not be able to speak Chinese while you have all the physical characteristics of looking Chinese. That was the starting point for the ways in which I began to theorise it. This relates very much to the experience of diaspora, being ethnic and not being 'authentic'. So I wanted to theorise this inauthenticity as a particular position. I wanted to turn something that is perceived as a lack — not being able to speak Chinese — into its own positivity. The notion of 'not speaking Chinese' has its own genealogies and its own cultural and political logic.

I was initially compelled to write that article because I was invited to a conference in Taiwan. It was a big cultural studies conference and Kuan-Hsing Chen (the conference organiser) said I could present a paper on anything I wanted to. I was aware this was the first time that I would be presenting a paper in a Chinese country, and felt that I had to address that. The fact that I am ethnic Chinese and I have never lived in a Chinese country was in itself a very contradictory position. I became very aware of a certain perceived lack in my own subject position, and that my not being able to speak Chinese would be more pronounced in a Chinese-speaking country. Taiwan is one of the countries of so-called greater China and most people there do speak Chinese. In a place like Taiwan, Chinese identity equates with being able to speak Chinese, or speaking Chinese as a matter of fact. I was aware that my not speaking Chinese would be something a lot of people would question. That people would ask me, 'you look Chinese, so why don't you speak Chinese?' This is a question that I get asked wherever I go. Generally when people ask me where am I from I say, 'well I was born in Indonesia of Chinese background'. Do you speak Chinese? No! So? These issues of subjectivity, marginality and being foreign are issues that have always interested me at a personal level, and not only at an intellectual level. But before this event I hadn't written a lot about it, and certainly not in English.

One of the issues that I think needs to be problematised from my own position (and I addressed that in the article) is the whole idea of homeland or country of origin, and a certain kind of essentialism about identity that is implied in dominant discourses: the notion that you can refer back to a certain point of origin that determines where you are from, and where you are from determines your subjectivity and your cultural identity. In some of the British work on diaspora by people like Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall there is a distinction made between roots and routes. I think that is a very interesting way of differentiating between essentialist and non-essentialist notions of identity construction, because it is not simply the case that identity is determined by your origins; identity is something that is in process all the time, and it is determined by the context that you are mov-
ing in and where you find yourself located. In my case, China does not determine my identity, even though there is a certain imaginary origin which refers back to a place called China. China is an imaginary context that impinges on my identity or my identifications, but it is only one of the things that impacts on my identity. There are a lot of other experiences and contexts that produce my identity, and they don’t have anything to do with China. But ‘China’ is always looming there, and it’s something that imposes itself on me even though I have never lived in China. I don’t know very much about Chinese culture and I don’t speak the language etc. So it is an essence that is imposed on me, rather than an ontological reality. Being Chinese is not necessarily something that comes from inside me, it is an identity that is socially constructed. But this identity formation has very concrete effects. Wherever I go people want to categorise me, and the category (deployed both by my own family and by the dominant culture) is ‘Chinese’, which operates as a discursive structure that is always there and constantly impinges on me. ‘Chineseness’ is something I have to negotiate all the time, it is not given in my roots or in my blood. When I say I am Chinese it is a choice, but it is not a completely free choice. I can of course deny that I am Chinese, that would be another choice, but I have found that is not really the most productive or empowering way to go. For me, identity is an ongoing process that never stops. Chineseness is not an essence of me, even if it might be thought of in terms of ‘race’. The notion of essence itself is a cultural construction, rather than a natural given.

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You were saying that your mother carries the burden of being Chinese. How does your mother negotiate her relation to China, and her experience of displacement?

My mother has always been acutely and deeply aware that she is Chinese. She lived in China when she was a child, but then moved to Indonesia. She was painfully aware that the fact of being Chinese outside China means that you can be the target of discrimination. I remember the ways she tried to warn us about it. But on the other hand, she was always very defensive about being Chinese. So there is this enormous tenacity about it — we are Chinese and we are not accepted, but we are Chinese and that is actually something very good, and something to be proud of. In the private sphere, she would get pleasure in acknowledging the greatness of Chinese culture or civilisation, for example. But I think her way of dealing with these contradictions is with an incredible defensiveness, a defensiveness about being Chinese which gets translated into a kind of chauvinism. She always assumes that being Chinese is a problem, but at the same time she wants to assert that Chineseness; she has a very strong interest in everything to do with Chinese culture and Chinese politics (she doesn’t communicate this to other people, it is contained very much within the family). She feels that China as a country has been the victim first of western colonialism, and later by the Cold War. She never even denounced Chinese communism because she felt, to speak in Australian terms, that the
Chinese and China never got a fair go!

Her position can sometimes be very overbearing. For example, when there is a flood or a natural disaster in China it affects her very deeply, whereas a flood in India would not. As I said I think there is a lot of tenacity in it, but also a lot of unfulfilled desire. I am sure she is not conscious of this at all. She would like to see a return of Chinese greatness in the world, and this is also a view that is quite common among Chinese intellectuals. There is this strong sense that China is a great civilisation and it has all gone to waste now. There is a feeling that nobody really acknowledged this greatness, especially in the West, and this feeling conveys a deeper regret at the loss of this real or imagined greatness. So there is a lot of Chinese chauvinism around. My mother now lives in Holland and that Chinese chauvinism is filtered through a feeling that as a Chinese person living in a western country there is always a lack of recognition for the Chinese from the dominant culture.

*In a way, this experience is not simply nostalgic, a mourning for a lost past or a regret as such — it involves a complex set of relations between real and imagined places. It is about living in the present, a present mode of reconfiguring the past or something like that.*

I think that is interesting, and I am not quite sure how to theorise it. It is definitely a regret. There are a lot of issues around nostalgia, but I am not quite sure how applicable it is in this context. Because there is a certain desire for something which is not there, and it is certainly something that has to be brought into the present and in the 'here'. The postulation of a Chinese greatness is used to fill a certain lack in her own life in the 'here' and 'now'. My mother would have liked to have had a fuller public and social life, and to be more recognised by other people. Instead what she experiences is living in a small Dutch town, and she feels that a lot of people don’t know about her background and that they are not interested. The Dutch people with whom she socialises generally don’t recognise her as a person coming from a different background. I think this is how people of a dominant culture commonly experience ethnic minorities. You are not recognised as different, as having a specific history or a relation to another culture. My mother would really very much like to have that recognition. So she lives in this imaginary world of a great Chinese civilisation that has to be constantly reconfirmed. I have never really thought through this issue completely, it just comes up in this context now. But I find this a very, very sad thing.

*I think about the conflicting imaginaries that are often experienced in diaspora — the imaginary relations to a previous home and experiences in present contexts — and how these are lived and experienced in very real ways.*

What I am now becoming interested in is precisely how that gets played out in everyday contexts, because we can talk about this at this particular level, and in literature it is talked about. But it is people’s everyday life, everyday awareness and the small things that people hold on to that I find fascinating. These things are almost intangible and very difficult to describe; it is a question of affect and of structure of feeling. For example, how as a foreigner you are constantly prevented from hav-
ing a sense of genuine belonging, in this instance in Australia. I suppose it has a lot to do with the indifference of the dominant culture, and the dominant can’t do very much about it either because they live in their own culture, which affords them a certain cultural unselfconsciousness. They have the privilege of not having to question their own identities, ethnicities and cultural specificities.

I just thought about my mother’s chauvinism in relation to the everyday. This chauvinism is a response to a need, and I think I have that need too, and there is pleasure in the ways you cultivate it. For example, I am sharing a house with a Chinese friend of mine. He is Malaysian Chinese and much more steeped in Chinese culture than I am. He does speak Chinese for example, he cooks Chinese food really well and all that kind of thing. We both are constantly aware of these issues around ‘Chineseness’ being a problem. But we often find pleasure and make jokes about everyday experiences and say, ‘well is this the Chinese way of doing it?’. We can laugh about our own chauvinisms, and it is especially plausible in the Australian context today where this new racist populism around Pauline Hanson has erupted. These everyday experiences are really forms of affirming and claiming our Chineseness. But this it is not something you can innocently adopt. It is incrementally working on how you identify yourself, and that does come out of a whole context where being Chinese is a problem. I think that is an interesting issue, because for people living in China, for example, Chineseness is not a problem because it is not problematised. You are Chinese and that’s it! So in a society where the Chinese culture are the majority and where Chinese culture is the hegemonic culture the kinds of pleasures that my friend and I have in claiming our Chineseness would not occur. I am sure people from mainland China would not really understand this at all.

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II

Critical Impurities, Cultural Practices

In the article ‘On Not Speaking Chinese’ you write about a politics of autobiography, and how it is important to articulate personal histories that are left out of dominant narratives, but at the same time imperative not to essentialise these histories. What you signal is the importance of autobiography, but also the need to articulate personal history in a broader context. How do you see a politics of autobiography operating in your own writings and history?

One of the things that I have been writing and thinking about recently is that the politics of autobiography is important in some contexts and at certain times, but not all the time. For me it is important, because in some ways it has always directly and indirectly informed my own work, but I still have to make this more explicit for myself. Not only my work on Chineseness and ethnicity but my previous work on media audiences, and the political positions that I have taken up. For example,
becoming a feminist had a lot to do with certain personal issues — it was not just about being a woman, but also being ethnic or a migrant. The funny thing is that personal history influences everybody’s work, but only some people acknowledge it or recognise it. So in that sense I find it important to point to the politics of autobiography in the feminist context, and also in the Taiwanese context I talked about before where it was a good strategic move to use the autobiographical. But I don’t think it is always strategically useful. In other contexts it is much more important not to speak about yourself, but to speak about others. So in that sense I think doing sociological surveys and talking in ‘objective’ terms about issues can be equally important. I don’t want to celebrate autobiography as the only useful and productive writing strategy. I think it depends on the specific context and how you can most effectively make an impact or intervene in particular debates that are going on. But I think sometimes in cultural theory and feminist politics what seems to happen is that people want to find THE solution or answer to an issue. I just don’t understand that. I think there are lots of possibilities and every time you make a move you have to find out what tools are available, which you can use and which ones you feel would be most productive and effective. There is a move to talk about the politics of autobiography as something that is in itself subversive, but I don’t think that is the case. Sometimes it can be completely narcissistic.

_How can we produce autobiography so it doesn’t become narcissistic, what tactics or interventions can be employed so the autobiographical doesn’t become a writing and reading practice that is caught in its own image?_

That’s why I find it really important to combine humanities modes of research with the social sciences. The humanities tend to be more into textual analysis and the kind of theorising that emphasise issues of subjectivity and culture. And I think when that is held unchecked it becomes a very limited discourse which talks about certain issues in ways that are not informed by the larger social world. The social sciences, especially sociology and related disciplines, tend to have a more objectivist view of the world — they can talk about the world in ways as if it were all unproblematically ‘there’ and describable in terms of scientific discourse. I think people become very uptight about methods and that is a problem. I think you have to look at the possibilities in a particular situation and use anything you can. But this particular way of working might actually be related to the positionality of the migrant, because migrants are often drawn to turning difficulties into opportunities. They are always, of necessity, on the lookout for possibilities and opportunities to work things out. My father is very much like that, so here too you can look at the autobiographical aspect of this particular conviction of mine.

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Critical Hybridity?

Recently you were involved in organising a conference called ‘(Im)purity: Critical Hybridity and Transculturation’. Hybridity is a well-used and also contested term in feminist and post-colonial theory. In your paper, you spoke about hybridity within the Australian context, the limitations but also the possibilities of this concept. What emerged from the day was that some people were interested in using the concept of hybridity while other people were rejecting it. How does the concept of hybridity influence your writing, and do you think the term still has currency?

Personally I don’t want to reject the term hybridity, but I am interested in the complexity of the uses and abuses of the term. For a while in cultural theory the term was taken up by people like Trinh T. Minh-ha and Homi Bhabha. They wanted to theorise the notion of ‘in-betweenness’ as a position, being between positions, and the ambivalence that this constructs for displaced or marginalised peoples (we talked about some of this before). There is no such thing as complete belonging or complete non-belonging, but they exist at the same time, and in that sense you move in and out of a culture, move in and out of a certain kind of bounded space. Trinh and Bhabha use it as a tool to problematise existing structures and cultural boundaries. But in some ways that position has been romanticised as a subversive position tout court. That is why a lot of people are now quite suspicious of it. In my conference paper, I described how hybridity was taken up by certain people in Australia as a means to try to solve a lot of the divisions within the community. So hybridity in that sense is used ideologically as a galvanising way of living together harmoniously and without much conflict. This is indeed a very problematic appropriation of the concept. But the term, analytically speaking, remains useful. For me, the in-between space is precisely what I am interested in. What does it mean to be both Chinese and also not being able to speak Chinese? What does it mean, as in my case, to be both accepted as a person who does useful things in Australian culture, but who at the same time also feels not Australian? I find this ambivalent logic being neither/nor, or both/and, interesting. One of the ways you can use this ambivalence is to look at the specific consequences and impacts of those in-between positions in different contexts. In this sense it is not a subversive position but more a starting point to look at different realities and do further research into them.

In general, the debate about hybridity is very much framed in terms of whether it is a good or bad thing, but I am not interested in whether it is good or bad. I am interested in the productivity of hybridity in particular contexts. We can’t know that in advance. Sometimes the notion of hybridity can be useful and at other times it may not be. So we can’t generalise about it. What I find really interesting is that hybridity is one of the few terms we have that starts out with the blurredness of boundaries. For example, many other concepts like ethnicity, race or feminism all start out

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2 This conference was held in July 1996 at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean.
3 The paper presented at the conference was called ‘Beyond Hybridity’. This paper has not been published, but for some related themes see Ien Ang ‘One Can Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm’ (1998b).
with a fixed entity, whereas hybridity is a concept that starts out with the impossibility of those entities as fixed and static unified wholes.

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There are problems with the concept of hybridity. For example, Nicholas Thomas argued at the conference that one of the problems with hybridity is that you have two entities that were already there and then brought together. I am not convinced that the term hybridity necessarily has to presuppose fixed entities in advance, because the term hybridity itself has become loose in a way. So it is a question of how to theorise it, but on the other hand it is also the case that fixed entities might not be there in reality, rather they are posited as constructs and lived as such. For example, we can say that the notion of 'Australia' is not actually real. We can't use Australia as a starting point because the boundaries around Australia have always been blurred. But historically speaking, the term Australia has always been used to describe and construct a fixed unity, and that in itself has its own effects and its own productivity. The White Australia Policy was very much a policy that constructed a homogeneous and mostly closed Australia. That is always at one level illusory, but as a political force it has been terribly real. So even though you can say that fixed entities are fictional, fictions have real effects. I don't care that entities are fictional, because fictional reality is a reality nonetheless. In the nineteenth century, hybridity was used very strongly as a term to indicate the mating of two different 'races'. But even though we can now say that the different 'races' are fictional entities, they are still perceived as real. What I find so odd with a lot of cultural theorising is that people think that once they have unmasked something as fictional it no longer has force, which is not true. For example, the concept of race was incredibly powerful in the nineteenth century to differentiate between peoples and hierarchise them; 'race' was seen as real and as biologically inscribed. We now live in a century where the concept of race, scientifically speaking, no longer has any currency, but the concept of race, culturally speaking, still has an incredibly strong currency. So it doesn't really matter that it has been scientifically refuted, because it still has cultural and discursive effectivity. These concepts still circulate and are in peoples' heads, and that in itself is a reality.

III

Unfinished Business

Earlier you were talking about the ability to claim a certain Chineseness with your friends, and I think this ability to take on identity and 'play' with it is historically based. For example, when I was growing up in Australia the derogatory term used for Greeks and Italians was 'wogs'. Now I can claim that term with humour and mobilise the rhetoric to work on (and with) the discrimination that structures many migrant relations to
a dominant culture.

I think it is definitely much more possible now to reclaim these kinds of positions. I think historically, this shift has emerged worldwide from the early seventies. For example, in the United States the whole idea of the melting pot turned out not to work. People started to claim their differences, racial and ethnic differences that cannot be erased. As a result of this articulation, societies defined themselves in more pluralistic and multicultural terms. From within that space, it has been possible to take up ‘ethnic’ positions in more assertive ways. So it does become more pleasurable because the pressure of denial (which I talked about before) was more something that we had to deal with in order to live in a monocultural environment. There was an incredible push to assimilate or a pressure to assimilate and that is no longer the case, at least not at a superficial level.

But I think that any system will have its limitations. For example, the move toward a ‘multicultural’ Australia creates a different infrastructure through which you can negotiate your own identifications. In Australia thirty years ago you couldn’t flaunt your Chineseness, because if you did you would be placed outside of the community. Whereas in a society that defines itself as multicultural there is, in principle, a discourse guided by the notion of inclusion, that you are part of the community even though you are different. But then that difference remains problematic, although the ways in which it is problematic have changed. On the whole, I would certainly still defend multiculturalism because it does open up a space in which you can negotiate with many more different positions than in the past. I think a multicultural discourse is more open-ended because there is more room to manoeuvre; you can either take up the position of an ethnic or not. I want to define it as an open position because, ‘okay, you are Greek or Chinese or Lebanese or Italian, or whatever’, but these are positions that are available now to be filled in and lived out, claimed and given shape to. But that in itself is an ‘unfinished business’ — you have to constantly deal with it and any attempt at closure of those particular positions is problematic, closure from either the dominant culture or the ethnic communities themselves. For example, if an ethnic community would say, ‘this is Italian culture or this is Chinese culture’, then people who find themselves in that position can have problems with the limits imposed by those definitions.

There have been criticisms of multiculturalism as a policy as distinct from, say, the notion of the ‘multicultural’. There is a distinction between multiculturalism as a social policy and as an ideology, and the multicultural as a more enabling position.

Definitely, and I think multiculturalism as a policy, if I can talk about it from a very narrow point of view, is about governments deciding what to do with migrants. Governments deciding whether or not migrants will be able to keep speaking their own language or whether they get assistance in maintaining their culture, and these kinds of issues. Governments in the past were much less willing to do so. Government policies do affect the creation of possibilities and I suppose any policy will have good things and bad things about it. I don’t think any policy can solve the problems of the
foreigner. I think it can only create different infrastructures for them.

The ways in which multiculturalism is defined in a dominant sense, and the kind of backlash that we are experiencing in Australia at the moment — the whole Pauline Hanson phenomenon and the problems around immigration — emerge because of the limits and closure of this discourse. Because the dominant culture defines the ‘multicultural’ in the public sphere and what ‘multiculturalism’ is, the limitations of this allow for the resurgence of (populist) nationalist positions.

It is a multicultural Australia after all! Certainly one of the problems of multiculturalism as a policy is that it is defined in terms of an already existing nation, and this nation is called Australia. Australia is the unproblematised starting point for it. A multicultural Australia is not supposed to deconstruct Australia, rather Australia is reconfigured to absorb all the differences within it. This becomes a construction of diversity through different cultures operating within the boundaries of Australia. So multiculturalism as a governmental policy is a way of redefining national identity to reconcile the existence of diversity into a new kind of unity, so as to make diversity unthreatening.

From the foreigners’ point of view, whether you do or do not belong to Australia is always a question and that will always remain a problem. Whereas for the government, even though you are from an ethnic background you are also an Australian, and that’s the end of the story. From the migrant subject’s point of view it is not that simple. In the official culture these ambivalences are impossible to acknowledge or to comprehend. So these ambivalences happen on the edges of culture and through circumstances which cannot be made official at all.

You have written about migrants coming in and having an uneasy relation to subjectivity and identity in the nation, but you have also talked about Aboriginal people’s relations to the nation; obviously they have another relation to the nation and to multiculturalism.

There are differences between migrant and Aboriginal people’s relations to the nation, but there are also similarities. In some ways, the ambivalence, and the ambiguity of belonging or not belonging, is similar for migrant groups and Aboriginal people. But for Aboriginal people it is more dramatic because their existence unsettles the very foundation of the Australian nation state. When you now look at the government and the dominant culture there is a pressure that reconciliation is happening or supposed to happen. The idea is that Aboriginal people have to fit themselves into the nation state of Australia. So reconciliation becomes a logic that is incorporated into what Australia already is defined as. From this dominant position, reconciliation cannot go beyond the construction of the Australian nation state as it has developed over the last 200 years. From the Aboriginal point of view that cannot ever be the case, there is always a point of tacit conflict. In the end, reconciliation can never be completely finished, because Aboriginal people cannot ever be incorporated fully into the existing symbolic and cultural boundaries of the Australian nation state. But the dominant culture cannot recognise that its own boundaries are precisely the problem for Aboriginal people, for migrant groups and ethnic subjects. It is the problematisation of those boundaries that is precisely out of bounds.
That seems to be what creates racist rhetoric because the foundation of the nation is still based on a notion of what the Australian nation already is. The nation incorporates others into this framework because it can't 'digest' them. Because of this 'indigestion' there is an inability to transform the basic cultural and symbolic structures of the nation state. The off-shoot of that is racism and a kind of racist closure...

The notion of closure is very important because it is understandable that members of the dominant culture are threatened when their own culture is questioned. It is not surprising that that feeling of being threatened is somehow channelled in ways that operate more therapeutically. Here racism becomes the easiest option and it is a very defensive racism. It is not the aggressive racism that the Nazis had, for example. It is a racism born of fear and a feeling that others are coming into your space, and that is what's happening when Pauline Hanson says, 'where do I go?' White Australians are now trying to find a space to rearticulate themselves within the nation, because their sense of belonging has always been taken for granted in the past and it is now being problematised. This is incredibly traumatic for many people. This is heightened by Aboriginal issues, that Australia was not always 'our land'. Recognition of previous occupation is difficult to accept, so for white Australians the legitimacy of being in the nation becomes problematised. But that is something that ethnics, Aboriginal peoples and dispossessed people have always experienced. White Australians have to come to terms with the fact that 'being' here is not automatically accepted as legitimate.

For me, the interrogation of 'whiteness' and belonging is an important shift in understanding racism — the different ways it gets articulated in the public sphere and in everyday life, and how it registers a different sense of belonging or not belonging for 'white' Australians. I think we need to address the different ways racism is emerging now.

I think that the current forms of racism in Australia come out of a sense of vulnerability, and everybody has to try and understand that. I think if you say, 'oh God, it is just the same old bullshit', this is not very productive. Because these are real fears and feelings of threat. The point is that white Australians are now forced to adopt positions that others always have had. It is really difficult for them to accept because they have to give up something, namely the privilege of their own position. At a broader level, it is not just the question of individual subjects, I think the whole nation state of Australia is in a state of crisis. On the one hand there are the indigenous issues and on the other hand there is this very strong discourse of being part of Asia. I am sure for a lot of white Australians this is incredibly threatening, because now they have to redefine themselves as part of a region that they have always wanted to set themselves apart from.

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One of the things I would like to emphasise is that talking and dialogue are often words used to offer a solution. And I think communication in itself poses a lot of problems, one of them of
course is miscommunication, failure of communication and misunderstanding, which happens all
the time. This is basic to any semiotic or communication theory, that communication is always liable
to aberrant decodings, to people who lose interest and do not really listen to the complexities of the
dialogue. It is that complexity that needs to be addressed for new modes of cultural theory and fem-
inist research to emerge.
Foreign Bodies
Alphonso Lingis

Foreign Bodies is a meditation and cultural reflection on the relationships between language, bodies and cultural perception. How do we think about ‘communities of those who have nothing in common’ and the ethics of otherness? How can we understand other histories and life experience from outside the paradigms of western culture? Alphonso Lingis is a philosopher and writer who travels extensively throughout the world. Writing often as a foreigner in ‘third world’ countries, he recounts the abuses and complicities of this relationship in his essays and books.¹ We met in London in April 1996 to talk about his recent writing: Abuses, The Community of Those Who Have Nothing In Common, and Foreign Bodies. I asked Alphonso how his writing and experience of different cultures intersect with his philosophical work and thinking on otherness.

I

Abuses

The first time I went to Khajuraho in India to see the great erotic temples, I had vividly the sense that this was one of the grandest things that my eyes had seen, that could be seen on the planet. I thought it was completely improbable that I would see them: my parents were Lithuanian immigrant farmers and I was the only son; I ended up an intellectual and I never met anybody who had ever gone to Khajuraho. All my colleagues, all the philosophers I had ever known, had never gone to places like India and they certainly don’t wander around and confront Khajuraho. When I was there I tried to read everything, but I had no access to Indian languages — so I could only read Indian works in English and guide books and so on. And everything I read was just ludicrous. Most Indian writers writing in English reinterpret their own tradition in Hegelian terms. When I left India I had understood very little and I thought this was just one of the grandest things that I had ever seen or could see. I had the idea that when I retire I will return and have more time there, and that before I die I would write something as a kind of acknowledgment of this gift that was given to me.

When I returned to the United States somebody had a cultural conference in Canada and they invited me. I knew most of the people and they said talk about anything. I thought I would see if I could write something on Khajuraho and to my astonishment I wrote something. It certainly is not any kind of final statement but I was just amazed that I could write something. After that I had this very powerful idea that things that moved me most, not only by their own intrinsic grandeur or mystery, but also by the fact that they were addressed personally to me and that they had come into my life, were the things I should write about. Eventually this got put together in Excesses but by the time

I got to the pieces that got counted in *Abuses*, that was really what I was doing. I wrote about what really moved me most deeply and sometimes it was wonder — like in Antarctica — and sometimes it was deeply troubling and painful, like some of the pieces about torture and the piece about Bangladesh.

I think I write very naively. I don't at all reflect on things and I think that has been true for as long as I can remember. Recently, I have become a little more clear about it. It was when I was working with a student who was writing a dissertation on conceptual models. In talking to him I became very resistant to this idea and I thought that the task was to address yourself to some reality and for it to be in your own terms. Several times sacred places were very important to me, like Teotihuacán in Mexico or Borobudor or those that I haven't even written about yet... When I go to a new temple, I think sort of instinctively — I am always looking towards a 'here', what is in this temple. Other studies I had done on temples could not serve as some kind of paradigm or outline to capture this experience. So I think what I would like to happen is that language form itself from what you see or hear, coming from this kind of confrontation.

I don't think I have a policy statement on writing, but I do have some feelings. If I would think back on *Abuses*, there were a lot of places in that book where I was very aware of that exploitative presence — for example in the essay about the refugees, the Bangladesh refugee camp in Dhaka. But I didn't take the position of a kind of sovereign outside observer, though on the other hand I also felt a great distance. I think I felt that very, very intensively the first time that I went to India — when I went to Calcutta to stay several months it was beyond what I was in any way prepared for. I was afraid of Calcutta and it had the reputation of a city dreadful at night. I arrived in the evening and as soon as I booked into a hotel I immediately always went out. My hotel was near the centre and it was in the middle of the monsoon, sort of raining, and all the streets were lined up with Bangladesh refugees, emaciated, and there were five million — most of them in and around Calcutta. As soon as my white face was visible, I was surrounded by these people, women with emaciated babies at their breast; it was horrifying. I was really shuddering in my hotel that night with the horror. I somehow had always felt — it was an idea that I found in Nietzsche — that suffering does not exceed human capacity. He says that people are afraid of the suffering, of the last agony. He says animals withdraw when they suffer, they don't dread it, they wait for it and don't bother the rest of the herd or the group. And when the pain gets too intense for consciousness to bear it by nature, consciousness fades out. It is the fear of suffering that is worse, it makes cowards of us more than the pain itself. And that is something I verified in a very personal experience — not me personally but my mother's dying. It was an almost unbearable thing to watch, but she bore it with great strength and courage. So she had the strength and that made me believe that one does have the strength. But months later in Calcutta, the last night I was there, I took another midnight walk — I wept, really wept. About a week later I was in Paris seeing friends and talking about India. A friend showed me
an account of the refugee situation and again I wept. I had just seen that a week ago but it was like
the mind couldn't remember that long, it was a suffering greater than the mind could get any kind
of hold on. I thought, I am sleeping in this bed and right on the other side of the world I know there
are these people sleeping in the rain on the sidewalk and yet I slept on a bed. And there isn't any kind
of justification for that. Some people justify that, saying that I am doing good in my own way by
sleeping on a bed. I am saving my strength for some article I might write. I think that is fake justifi-
cation. I think one is simply guilty.

I always felt that the fact that I was rich and they were poor could never be eliminated from
a friendship. When you met someone in the street and you invited them to a restaurant you had to
think. You wanted them to get a decent meal but you also wanted them to be brought into a restau-
rant where you could have a friendship, where that person would not feel embarrassed, out of place.
So restaurants I would freely go into would be crossed off the list in my mind while making that invi-
tation. In things like that you are aware that you could never forget that they are impoverished and
by comparison I am quite rich. And it was a poison. A lot of people talk about when you go to these
poor countries everyone looks at you as a rich guy, that they are going to try and hassle something
over. I really have met an awful lot of people and I would certainly say the vast majority of people I
encountered did not look at me in this way.

I am all too aware that I am part of a rich culture that is getting richer and richer and more
and more dominating, and that you never escape this complicity. The only thing I think is that at least
you have to be lucid, you don't want to get hypocritical and justify yourself. I tend to go only to third
world countries, partly because they are the most foreign. But nonetheless when one goes to a coun-
try like Haiti a lot of it is going to be miserable, depressing, and a lot of what you see is not at all an
interesting, alternative culture; it is just misery.

I think I have always been aware there is an otherness that is irreducible, that there is a suf-
ferring in every friendship. But there is another side. I think that nowadays so many cultural critics go
all the way, and I don't. There are people who are just analysing the anthropological discourse, as his
own discourse about the people — about his informants and their discourse. The most extreme form
you have, well, look at Lévi Strauss. His own purpose in anthropology is never to give a local per-
son's account of their culture, but instead to give a totally different account in western scientific
terms. It is this language, its analysis and structure, that I have resisted. If I would ever try to say it
publicly, people would dismiss it as nineteenth-century romanticism.

I think that there is a way that you can understand people outside of objective structures. I
continue to think that you do not just reflect on your own language and perceptions. But so often in
my life with people I have met, I have had a friendship — young people, old people, men, women
who are radically different in culture. I have been with people who are silent, rural people, peasants
in Peru. I think there is an awful lot of deep understanding that goes on without language structures.
But there are moments in which I couldn’t believe that I understood how someone suffered, saw or felt. Here again I gather a very explicit example from the first time I went to India. I was walking in the street among the crowds of Calcutta and a young guy smiled and I smiled back. Before long I mentioned I was going up to a restaurant. I was happy to buy somebody a meal. I am sure that is why he made contact, he hoped that I would buy a meal. We ended up being friends. I couldn’t believe how he had the kind of understanding he had. He had no education, he was a Bengali refugee, he had grown up in the streets. And I was highly educated from the other side of the world and was also some ten years older than he. In America this wouldn’t be possible — I mean first of all someone ten years younger than me would never even want to have any kind of friendly contact, and secondly we would have nothing to talk about. Every day he had such keen sense of what might bore me, what might interest me, what we could do together that would be entertaining to both of us — he sensed these things. At the time I thought, how can he have such tactful understanding of me?

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In some parts of your book Abuses there is an address to the reader as ‘you’ — sometimes it is unclear who is the ‘other’, who is writing and whose experiences you are conveying.

Several people have asked me why I used the term ‘you’. At the time it seemed right and I really in my own mind did not have a reason for it. Of course, on the one hand, ‘you’ is complicit. It ascribes what follows to the reader or the listener. On the other hand, the ‘me’ who had been there I had now a certain distance from. When I write these pieces it is as though I was speaking to myself, asking questions of myself. So I was trying to understand myself at the time; I didn’t have a grammatical reason. When I wrote ‘Lust’ I was invited to do a panel session at a conference in France and the topic was ‘sexual difference’. I thought this must be a code word for a current debate, but I hadn’t been in France for a while and at first I didn’t know what the specificity of issues around sexual differences were (I was writing this in Peru so I had no access to the French debate on sexual difference; I didn’t have any books there). They had invited all the prominent French feminists like Sarah Kofman, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. So my first idea was to write about transvestites. I was dazzled by the great acts they do in Bangkok. It is hard to describe because it is so dazzling. There are these incredible actors in the cabaret. The performer comes out — turns one side to the audience and begins singing an Italian belcanto duet in his tuxedo. Then he flips around with the long hair and a sequined dress. Then towards the end he faces the audience in an embrace. It is a hoot when they do this — you can’t believe what you are seeing! It is more than copulation because it is the same person. I mean it is really like Aristophanes and these two halves that have come together. I was going to go to Bangkok and ask them to sell me one of these costumes and do the paper in a costume.
This idea of a costume led me to think that the only thing I can talk about on sexual differences and that really moved me deeply was the Bangkok transvestites. When I finished presenting this paper, there was to my complete astonishment, no doubt naivety, an immediate attack by women. I had no sense that this would happen. At one point one of the very vehement objections, and I think that was the only objection I really understood, was a woman who said to me, 'you are always saying *you*, but I feel excluded from this *you* — it is a very male *you* that you use in this paper!' And it was then that I thought, 'oh people know rhetoric' — when the author uses *you* it is an inclusive *you*, so somehow the things are being attributed to the reader, all these events and so on. And then I thought it is kind of natural that I had an instinct to use *you*, and one of the reasons that it was troubling the audience was that there was complicity throughout. I didn’t at all take the position of an observer of this scene, but as a complicitous participant in this scene. I didn’t at all say, 'those men are dirty old men, pigs all leering and so on'. I always included myself and I think this was also instinctual because I completely to this day admire these performers, they are just stunning performers and I am completely wowed by them as people.

**II**

**Memories and Perceptions**

In your books there are a lot of images accompanying the writing. I am wondering about the photographs and the production of these images in your books, how taking photographs influences your perception and how this effects the way you write about and remember a place.

I started taking photographs that accompany my books very late. There again it was very naive. For many years I thought there is something completely false in trying to capture the past and it seemed when I would go to a foreign place that what really counted was the way it changed my mind. The whole thing of capturing images was false and was exploitative. You are taking images of other people and very often without them knowing it. At first I just wanted to have buildings and landscapes and then by accident I discovered that children kept jumping and getting into the photograph. They love to be photographed and they thanked me for photographing them even though they would never see it.

I discovered that taking photographs was the best gift I could give. It was more than money. There is something honest about it and it was my technological thing. In Haiti, for example, these people could never afford such a thing. When people have nothing it is the human contact that is the most important. Having the images of their wives, their children, their grandmothers that they can keep years later was wonderful and was most precious to them. So that is how photography became important to me. And when I see these images I am deeply moved because I remember the people or person and their response. Very often in third world countries it is very difficult or virtually impos-
sible to photograph women. Peruvian women will actually cover their faces and cross the street if they see the camera pointed in their direction. In India too it is very hard. Sometimes I was taking photographs of street scenes with a zoom lens and not asking the people in advance. You can try and hide the fact that you're photographing them because if they notice they will stop what they are doing. But when I was taking photographs of individuals there was always some kind of permission. I always made some kind of sign and then in every case where I could I tried to return with the photo. Sometimes when I found people were particularly into photographs, I would do a whole study of them and then later on I would give them the images. In this way, I came to see photographs as a way to actually help people. I mean the very act of photographing was an encounter. When I would come back with the photographs, very often they would call in all their friends and insist I come in the house, sit down and have tea and so on.

The other aspect to taking photographs is that I discovered very soon what it did to my own eyes. When you begin to take photographs you begin to see the glitter of light. I remember the last time I was in London and saw the lights — it was so spectacular. This very angular light, winter light, is particularly clear, so that you become sensitive to light, to forms and so on. Photography was a kind of transfiguration of perception that was very precious to me. And I think it was made more dramatic when I started photographing people. I think natural perception tends to take in the person as a whole; when you start photographing it is rare that you would do that. For close-ups you might crop the face or the hands or something like that, and so one begins to see people this way. I also really discovered beauty in physical types and ethnic types that I don't think I would have discovered otherwise. I felt it was a very dramatic development in perception.

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In a different way in relation to images and photographs, the notion of the 'face' of the other is important. This imaging process captures a kind of 'surface' — a face of others and at the same time a kind of depth to the experiences you shared and captured on film. I am interested in your notion of face and the question of otherness...

I haven't completely got onto the whole aesthetics of photography, but I think that this is something one should think through, how some photographers really use the face as a purely formal property, like a stone. It seems to me that so much of the formal beauty of the face is inseparable from its action. Maybe just in the very simple sense that as one discovers the beauty of the face one almost reveres it, one wants to protect it, it is precious and fragile...

I think I saw the notion of face in Levinas and went in a somewhat different way than he did. The first thought was when someone faces you they appeal to you and put a demand on you. The act of facing is exposing the surface and the substance — they can put an appeal to you. The simplest
possible case is you walk through the door and you are aware of people as forms. Then someone turns and faces you and says 'hi'. This is already an appeal to interrupt you or your preoccupation, or to direct your attention to him or her and to respond. To not answer a greeting is an offence. As one enters into any kind of prolonged kind of face-to-face relationship in conversation, the one who faces continues to be there as an appeal and a demand. And I think the easiest way to see that is in language. Every statement in the face-to-face conversation that is put forth is addressed to you, who are being faced, and requires some kind of response. But I think it is not just the verbal form and the linguist formulas that contain this evocative and imperative force. It is also the nakedness, the disarmedness of the person before one. One can think of the eyes, the most unprotected part of the body and also the most unstable: the eyes have continual movement. The eyes lack the stability and shield which we associate with self-containment and self-sufficiency — the eyes are always searching. When you look at the eyes, as someone once said, there is a kind of night in the corner of the eyes. The face is unprotected, it is denuded, it is naked. The unprotectedness is on the surface. When you look at the face you don't at all see through it to the bones and so on. It is a surface phenomenon.

I've just had some more thoughts on the nakedness of the whole body that derives from the face. It is the face that reveals itself. Even when one denudes oneself erotically, the view of the body could be erotic because it has a face. The physical reality that marks the wounds and the fatigue is seen on the face. So the face is a kind of surface with whom one stays but it is a kind of sign board — it is where one makes signs to the other. But these signs, because of the physical reality of the flesh, dissolve as soon as they are formed. All of this gives us the sense of a kind of destitution and denuding of the person facing you. I feel this very intensely in other countries. When you walk along the street and you answer someone's greeting, be it a child or a waiter, there is already a feeling you are beginning to expose yourself to judgment, to need, to a desire of the other. And in facing the person there is a kind of nominal denuding and destitution, whereas if you turn away you close yourself back into a kind of self-sufficiency...

The feeling of obligation would be a fundamental ethical fact. If there are any ethics at all it means that I recognise that I am obliged by something outside myself. I started by thinking that this experience, its own basis, is the face of these people. To face other people was the most intense fundamental unquestionable ethical experience. But I have extended this towards other animals in a book I have just finished. It seems to me more and more that it is the material properties of a being that faces us, that make demands on us. What I see on the face of the other is a kind of concentration of light. It seemed to me that when you wake up in the morning and there is a radiant light outside, it is wrong to stay inside. One is called forth by the light. The light is a kind of summons. It summons us in someone's look. I really saw it as the basic ethical experience, not something like an abstracting of a soul but rather the very concrete event of encountering someone who faces me.

*In this sense, the question of ethics in relation to an other would be very specific to where you are, and*
I think that provides an interesting rethinking of ethics.

It is also the experience of the other. Inasmuch as the person who faces me puts demands on me and makes appeals to me, they stand outside as other, outside of this encounter. By just looking at people in the street as they go by or from the window, you get a fundamental experience of similarity. They are like so many different bits of myself. One of these interchangeable forms turns to face me, then something outside, something other stands before me. I think that is the most intense experience in which we discover the other person. I wanted to talk about this architecturally. In authority we don’t want to recognise the right or the demands being put on us. The dean has this elevated chair or a kind of throne behind a desk and the student comes in and is maintained at a distance. This kind of physical experience already denies the appeal being made. The student will be treated as another student. The dean will evoke the general rule that applies to all students in order to deny the singular appeal. I think I could talk about the whole architecture of authority and subjugation.

III

Foreign Bodies

Your notion of language and sensibility is quite different from a purely linguistic one and informs much of your writing on ‘foreign’ bodies and communities. How would you describe your notion of language and perception?

I am just starting to think this through in The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common. In the essay, ‘The Murmur of the World’ it was spelt out in a way that I had never been able to before. I cite authors that helped me as I came to think that there is a sensual, animal quality to language. Jean Luc-Nancy says that the first thing when two people meet and say anything to each other is the tone. When someone comes rushing in, is all excited, frenzied, the first thing you pick up on is the tone. So you say, ‘What’s up?!’ or you might just say, ‘What’s up’. That is a refusal of the tone, but the refusal of the tone means that what you caught is the tone. The urgency, the panic in the tone links to the other person’s sonorous rhythm, which is a vital rhythm. The connection is made even before language begins to convey messages. One could imagine no end of situations where someone could come to you but with an entirely different tone. Some people would have a kind of hysterical tone and you would realise at once that this is a wrenching, personal suffering they are in. Sometimes from the tone you would sense at once some kind of financial problem that you might help, or something like that, or a practical problem — you know the car broke down. I was so struck with this level of communicating with the tone. Another thing that struck me a long time ago is that a verbal, let’s say a ‘cinematographic’ account of a conversation, shows how much redundancy there is. You know, even all the sentences that... well I just said ‘you know’, you know all these lit-
tle redundancies. The other person is constantly responding with 'yeah, yeah' or 'understandable' or 'yes' or so on, and all this is redundant. If you would write up all of these redundancies in a letter to communicate what I wanted to communicate, it would be a quarter as long again in terms of words used. So there are all those other words that don't really have a message function. There are kinds of verbal functions that continue the sonorous contact.

I just thought of something I had never thought before, both in your question and your own gestures. I think the usual category of body kinaesthetics — at least what I have read people talking about gestures and body kinaesthetics — were really talking about them as part of language, either as mimicking the message that the words were saying, amplifying it or giving it a certain grammatical place. But there are also other kinds of gestures which involve being in the space, interweaving the same space, a kind of personal presence to the other person. Just as you were speaking I imagined what it would be like for two people to get together and make no gestures. Like people who get up on the podium and during their whole speech they are holding onto the podium without a single gesture. No conversation occurs this way, but suppose a conversation did. What would you think? You would think there was some kind of refusal, there was some kind of wall that was being maintained there. When you and I gesture I don't actually insert my body into the space between your hands — but almost! This is the place of our personal meeting.

To follow on from this, it seems to me that your notion of gesture is influenced by Merleau-Ponty and his notion of perception, and I want to ask the tail end of the question before — how do you see the relationship between the body and movement, gesture and perception?

I think some of the theoretical structures involved in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* I have serious objections to that I can spell out. But on the issue that you are pointing to, the relationship between body, body gestures, position, stance, movement and the perceived, I think Merleau-Ponty is right and I don't think I have much in the way of explicit thoughts that are different from his. But the book *Women Fire Dangerous Things* by George Lakoff is a very important book. He is a Californian linguist. I think that he has actually done what Merleau-Ponty had some outlines of doing in terms of gestural theory. In Merleau-Ponty's theory of language, words and sentences are conceived as gestures. He started to write a book on the origin of truth and he was trying to relate the kind of body language he spoke of in the *Phenomenology of Perception* to abstract thinking, mathematical thinking and logical thinking. But Lakoff has done this very strikingly. He conceives of concepts as embodied concepts like up and down, and higher and lower. Very often we just think of a concept in a kind of Aristotelian way, as a kind of abstract, inert structure of a thing. But Lakoff has a whole map of different kinds of concepts and they are all very body related. All these kinds of models are related to body postures, body grasps and movements. I taught that book a few years ago in a graduate seminar and I never wrote anything on it. But that was merely because I was so convinced, so dazzled by his insights, that I haven't gone beyond them in any way. I had nothing of my
own to say beyond what he would say.

I think that I move from Merleau-Ponty's idea to certain of Levinas's insights [on body style]. And I am especially thinking of Levinas's very first essay on aesthetics where he has a discussion of rhythm. Rhythm is something that doesn't lend itself to an intentional analysis. It is not that a constitutive mind is synthesising external data. A rhythm is something that you catch on to, that you are captivated by; in a sense you are no longer free, the mind no longer feels it is spontaneous. It is being rocked along, it is being led. It is captivated and entranced by rhythm and I think that's what happens when one catches onto someone's style. I recognise my mother from two blocks away by the way she walks. What I recognise first is not her complexion, colour of her hair or her dress, but that distinctive style of walking. I recognise this at once. The first thing you recognise is the style — the style of movement, the style of sitting, the style of interacting with a person. I think this is not so much knowledge, it is being captivated, like being caught by a rhythm on a dance floor.

*

In Foreign Bodies you talk about different notions of embodiment in relation to culture and you talk about the 'noble' body. For me this raises the question of the 'cultivation' of the body, how we produce our bodies in different cultural contexts. I am thinking how one cultivates a body, because different bodies have different forms of cultivation — a female body is differently cultivated to a male body; this poses another question. But in terms of body image, how does the notion of noble body alter 'bodily perception'?

That to me is a very important concept. I first thought about it in terms of Nietzsche. It seems to me that the term 'noble', for Nietzsche, is not fundamentally a political, social term. His primary reference is not the feudal aristocracy but animals. Once I picked this up, it seemed to me completely general — in so many ancient cultures that there is a sense of noble animals and gregarious animals. There is this whole biological dimension in Nietzsche's thinking. The European aristocracy originally were military men; they were the defenders of the community and achieved a freedom from labour so as to defend the community. But when feudalism set in they no longer had this role and they engaged typically in tournaments with horses, falcons and so on. Their kinship is with noble animals. And the noble body that they projected culturally, this refinement, is that of a racehorse, tiger or jaguar and so on. In virtually every culture I have become acquainted with the same things were certainly true — in Japan and among the Incas and Mayas. It seems to me that nobility is a very animal notion. A noble animal that still is left in our western cultures is the racehorse. The racehorse is a combination of power, instincts and extreme sensibility. A racehorse is on edge, quick, and has an extremely refined sensitivity and also a physical beauty.

Every culture has something like a body nobility. It occurred to me that every culture covers certain kinds of minds — the Byzantine mind is so distinctly different from the classical Hindu mind.
or the Roman mind. But there is also distinctive bodily perfection. In India, the yogic bodily postures are very different from the Japanese stance. The whole centre of gravity in Japanese physical perfection is different. African dancers, like the Masi that I saw in Kenya, do these great loops, they do this just to amuse themselves on long afternoons (they are herdsmen so they don’t actually work, just keep an eye on the herd). Bodybuilders and dancers are both strong, but with totally different kinds of strength. So I think there are many different bodily perfections and they are cultivated in culture, and my suspicion is that every great civilisation had a distinctive dominant physical ideal.

In a different way, the notion of the nobility of the body I think is a really interesting move away from thinking of the body as somehow outside of the formation of the self. In regards to women’s bodies (which is a bit different from what you are saying) there is a bodily perfection created in western cultures that is often alien to women. But I am thinking the notion of a ‘noble’ body and the cultivation of body, of woman’s body in their own image creates another kind of sensibility.

Perhaps the theme of animal and the notion of animal category may be useful. It means that the body discovers itself, its own powers and its own instinct, as opposed to the other angle, which would be the ways that a physical ideal is dictated by the culture.

* *

How does a body become other and alien to the community?

I had some years ago done a paper on Judge Schreber and his so-called madness. He calls it his nervous illness in Memoirs of My Nervous Illness, where all his visions are attributed to his nervous system. He picks up these visions and rays from God. I was very struck by Lacan and Lévi Strauss’s analysis of him, and there was a very clear article by Susan Sontag giving a completely sociological explanation of his madness. For me the issue was in what way is this discourse of madness excluded as not making sense by the community? With some people, like Nietzsche, there is a discourse whose categories are really diagrams of their affective life. This whole theme of bodies that are excluded from whole communities made me think of Nietzsche and his terms. We should really think of Nietzsche’s body, his affective life, his migraines and his euphoria as diagrams of many of the key concepts, like the eternal return, the will to power, and notions like value. I also began to think of the exclusion of the mystics. As Foucault writes, in the middle ages there wasn’t the category of the mentally ill — you were touched by God if you were lucky or you were a demon if you were unlucky. But these people seemed to have distinctive bodies — and that seems to me to continue to be true of shaman or the Native Americans and so on, people who have gone through physical crisis. They do have, at least they are perceived by the culture as having, distinctive bodies, and discourse is connected with that. And of course with shamans in their shamanistic culture they have a cultural place, but where they don’t have a cultural place they would be seen as not making sense.
I also thought about this in *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* in connection with those who are tortured. Michel de Certeau was very important to me in thinking those things. Those who are tortured are tortured because of what they say, and they are forced to say something. They are supposed to confess, not that they are wrong but what they were saying didn’t make sense. They are reduced to spasmodic, incompetent, brutal bodies in the process of torture. The judges are proving their words are senseless; they are demonstrating they are animals or brute animals. I am very convinced of this. Torture is very connected with language in this way, with a language which is deemed by the community to not make sense to them — demented, absurd and so on. I originally thought of that in terms of rape and that there too was a way bodies were excluded in the community through a kind of torture. Violence is not produced by an upsurge of animal impulses in individuals but by recurrence of institutions. The rapist after all has picked up his judgment of the subordination and inferiority of women and so on from the culture. This has been first of all institutionalised in the language of the culture, and secondly the practices of torture are picked up from institutions of torture like the CIA. These are institutions of torture, and as a matter of fact a great many rapists are former special forces commandos from the Vietnam War and so on. I think that maybe not all rapists actually torture, but after all a great deal of rape is torture. To actually torture women the rapist is not releasing individual basic instincts, violent instincts. He is picking up cultural practices which have been institutionalised — institutionalised ways of excluding people. So these are the ways I thought of these various categories of people that are excluded from the community, and I thought of them more in bodily terms. It seems to be that the culture is capable of institutionalising violence and of deadening, disconnecting the body.

IV

*Other Communities — Character, Dignity and The Break in Time*

*What interests me is the question of how people have a bodily ‘integrity’ even in the most oppressive and difficult situations — a kind of ‘integrity of the self’. This type of integrity is implied, I think, when you write about people in ‘other’ communities, but also in connection with death, and particularly your mother’s death.*

I think very recently, just this trip, I have gotten a few more thoughts on it. Courage is one dimension of it. I have been thinking more and more about courage. And I haven’t got very clear thoughts on it because it has gone in several different directions... But in the third world — and it is especially in the third world where people have great poverty, difficulty and often personal tragedy — I have felt most the important sense of character. Until recently people had character, and you felt that very strongly. In Latin America I was thinking about it in terms of men. Machismo has such a
negative connotation, at least it did during a certain period and in recent gender thinking. But I began to think that in Latin America it wasn’t completely a matter of domination. The first time I went to Mexico, at the airport there was this Mexican dressed completely in white — with black strings, big white hat, little moustache — looking incredibly glamorous. They have a sense of male beauty in this most spectacular form. Bullfighters are jewelled specimens of male on display, but also they have courage and they have their word of honour. Their word is a commitment and a pledge, that you don’t just drop when it becomes advantageous to yourself to do so. When they pledge their word they keep it. So I began to think that when people have nothing to identify themselves with they have character. This is a way poor people have a noble character.

But it also seemed to me that there were physical traits involved — to be brave means you have to maintain yourself as strong. There are certain physical traits that you have to maintain through discipline and a sense of personal, physical dignity. Secondly there are the character traits. The word character has finally dropped out of our psychology and philosophy; nowadays nobody talks about it. When I went to Afghanistan I felt this character so strongly. I remember the first time I went there (which was back in the sixties when people did go to these places) I came upon two students in Kabul the day I arrived. They were deathly sick with dysentery and so after days of this I suggested we go to an oasis outside of Kabul that was nice and cool and would be restful. As it turned out it was rather a difficult trip. We had to shift from one truck to another for three or four hours before we got there and it was a very dusty road. When we arrived my friends were in a state of collapse. By luck we saw these trees and we went to sit down to rest from this trip. A man came, an old man dressed in his robes of great dignity; his face was full of dignity. He carried a great pot of cool water, he came and offered us water. My dysentery-afflicted friends were terrified of this water and didn’t dare drink it. I drank it freely. And he sat there with us for quite a while. He had a personal dignity that was in his posture, in his features, in his garb, in his weathered face. There was no communication, I mean no verbal exchange, but there was a kind of silent communication. He stayed with us for a while and he was just being a friend. That was all. It wasn’t watching over us or seeing if there was anything else he could do for us; it was just being with us for a while. I often think of him when I think of the word ‘character’ — it was so unmistakable that here was a man of character. A kind of inner strength, integrity the word you used — it was so vivid in him. The very idea of going up to foreigners with a conviction that you can be of assistance and that you can really give something good like cold water. There is a sense of character in people who have no other way in which to construct an identity. It seems to me now in our consumer culture we construct our identity with things. We construct our identity with collections, with garb, you know with little things we have in our home, our jazz collection or collection of cars or whatever.
My mother was extraordinarily courageous. She died of cancer for months in hospital and it was the first time I spent a lot of time in a hospital. She lived in a small town near Chicago and when I was with her in hospital she would say, 'go visit that one, she was a neighbour, this one over there we knew her kids'. I would meet these women who, offhand one wouldn’t think anything of, one would think they were just housewives. They didn’t even have a job, lived in a small town the whole of their lives. Then I saw with my own eyes again and again the extraordinary bravery of these women. I remember the first woman I visited had leukemia. She told me very calmly as it gets worse she will die. But there was no tears at all, she wanted to talk about me. She wanted to have a relationship, a friendship. I was staggered — I thought this woman is dying of a painful and hopeless illness. I saw this again and again in the weeks that I was there. And I just came out of this thinking we are far more brave than we know, that there is a kind of animal bravery that comes out in the end — certainly in the case of my mother, but not only her. So many other people I saw who were in great suffering and especially hopeless suffering had this animal bravery. Animals are brave and when it is time for them to die they withdraw and stop eating and wait for death to come. They don’t cling to the rest of the herd. So I think this bravery is a very animal thing.

More and more in my recent writings I always say, 'the other animals'. I haven’t thought through this concept of 'animal' linguistically — the animal side of us which is also the most noble side of and certainly the wellspring of all the kinds of mental, spiritual, cultural nobility that we sometimes achieve. I haven’t been able to conceptualise it. But to me the clearest example I could give at the moment is this courage example — when I think 'where did these women get this courage?'. It seems they certainly did not get it from religion, because what I have read about people dying is that whatever religion you are, or people have no religion, it is not statistically decisive as to whether you die bravely or cowardly. So there are people who die bravely in every religion and in no religion. It seems that they certainly did not get this from their circumstances in society. They lived lives of subordinate housewives in a small town, many of them did not have careers and often they did not have significant jobs, they worked as clerks or something like that. So really this courage was a vital strength that is in our nature. So it was that sense of animal that seemed to me most clear. I would use this as the first case to try and conceptualise this concept of animality.

* * *

To refer back to communities again, there seems to be a 'time' that exists outside of the ways that we understand and write about history and cultural experience, a time and otherness excluded in the logical ordering and documenting of other communities and senses of being. In your writing on ethics and other communities are you offering another notion of time and otherness?
The most important thing I wrote recently was quite a long paper called ‘Dignity’.² I looked at Kant’s notion of respecting the other and then at Heidegger and Žižek, then at other figures like Nietzsche. I liked this paper at least for myself because it is the most complete thing I did on a number of important notions about this — about what you respect when you respect someone. In Kant’s most narrow view, it is the law as exemplified in the other, the other is a figure of law — women and certainly animals are excluded. In Žižek’s writing, it is the fantasy system of the other that excludes people from the community. I wrote a kind of synthetic study of all these things that gradually builds to my own idea.

But it was only this morning, just before our meeting, that I wrote a little essay on time. For Bataille, there is the time of endurance and there is what he calls catastrophic or explosive time. The other two I worked out this morning very easily and quickly: there is the Aristotelian time, which is the unending succession of time, and there is Heidegger’s time, which all seems unified, subjective and close to death and which is my own life time. Against that, Bataille has the moments of catastrophe — when the course of things or nature or the social world is catastrophically interrupted by revolution, by earthquakes, by tidal waves, by tornadoes and so on. What is death? The death of a collaborator, which is unthinkable. When I think of someone I always think of them in a course of projects, and even after someone is dead I can’t help thinking about them without thinking what they are doing. I think of my mother speaking to me. I think of her as a farming woman even though I know she is dead. I think of her in a project; the reality of death is an unthinkable catastrophe. I think I have always felt that. Even when I was an undergraduate working in a hospital, I had a sense that every single death was unthinkable, unacceptable and catastrophic. It was a very intense feeling.

The second example is nakedness. When you see anyone you see them clothed and groomed, which puts them in a category — all kinds of clothing is a uniform. As soon as someone knocks on your door and you see them clothed and dressed, even though they are a stranger, you have seen the commitments of their past and their future and you can identify a category of responses and behaviours that you are expecting from them and they are expecting from you. But to denude oneself, or for someone to denude himself or herself before you, is to take off these uniforms, these categories. You might end up with a naked body, which is already a uniform. I am thinking of bodybuilders who have body armour according to a model which you might see right away. But then I’m thinking one might see the breasts of a woman which are not muscular, or the belly or the side or the inside of their arms and thigh. Any kind of encounter with this finality of nakedness is by contact. I mean there is a real feeling; you touch it and you feel the spasms of pleasure and feeling. Just to look at it and see it as flesh is a caress — to sense this sensitivity, this sensuality there outside of category. And that is only in the present. That doesn’t give you at all the acquaintance of how that flesh will continue to act, or commitment it will be in, or how it has been. It seems to me that every time you see

² ‘Dignity’ has not been published, but for related themes see Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (1998).
someone naked and even caress them with your eyes or think of touching them, you always have the
sense that it will be a pleasure that they have never felt before, that it will be some kind of surprise
to them. The touch will be some kind of surprising pleasure that means the past is cut off and the
experience is totally in the present. So that too is a break in time, a catastrophe. It is a time when per-
manence and endurance break. This understanding of time — time as break and experience in the
present — would be a whole new way of understanding and thinking about the other community.

But somehow these words are not the right words. I was struck by watching the tube and see-
ing the horrifying sights of the civilian massacres in Lebanon. I was wondering, watching the news,
what would it be like if I was suddenly trapped in a war. I have never been in a war. What does it
mean to suddenly have a foreign country bomb you, civilians, your children, your homes, your roads.
It is a total catastrophe for those people. You have seen them on the tube, these people are hysteri-
cal with grief, their families, their children, their husbands are killed. That gave me such a sense of
catastrophe. In my life I have always done whatever I have wanted to do. I get this from my father.
He was a peasant in Lithuania. He escaped, by hiding in a hay wagon by night, into Prussia in 1910.
Somewhere he made a way to America without knowing a word of English. He had never been to
school, he didn’t know how to write. That always gave me the idea that I could do anything. I had
this completely privileged position as an academic because I got my first job by mail. And Penn State
University later came to me and asked me to apply. To my surprise they gave me tenure. So I had a
life that was somehow very determined, and very quickly I realised I can go anywhere in the world
on a fluke. This is very privileged on my part and then today I was thinking about this sense of cata-
strophe. On the tube these people are hysterical with grief and they didn’t even enlist in the war. I
have this sense that my life has never known a catastrophe.
Postscript — Journeys into Foreignness...
Kairos or the foreignness of my tongue

When I imagine the possible narratives and stories that cut across my different worlds, I try to find the language(s) to explain them. This is because, as Michel de Certeau notes, to transport oneself elsewhere is to create new spacings and relations to place that involve the crossing of boundaries. For de Certeau, every story is a travel story that demarcates a spatial practice. So, finding resemblances between different home-lands comes through a space of memory and perhaps it is the Greek kairos (time) that travels through my place at different speeds. De Certeau writes about how kairos (or the ‘right’ point in time) in narratives is mediated and ruptured by the spatial transformations of memory. When I read the word kairos in its English translation it lies flat on the page. I roll the word over my tongue kai-ros, kair-os, kairos. But it stills seems flat and foreign. I say the word over and over; the sound starts to take shape and I hear the word for the first time, for the first of many times before. This creates a bodily sensation for me; a simultaneous pang that creates a pleasure as I roll my tongue, and a strangeness as my tongue moves in a different way. The sound of the word orders the image — how many times have I heard my parents use it to refer to the time of day, the weather — have ‘you’ got the time? I remember, how it calls forth the image of Sundays at my parents’ house, painted in sky blue and yellow that imitates the Aegean sea and sun of Greece. Or I remember my father asking me why I am interested in a kairos long past — why I was asking him about Egypt and his former home-land? The word kairos travels across my tongue and into a foreign place that brings forward the memories of a Greek language and place that I inhabit in-between different points in time.

For me, the sound of kairos in its flatness resonates and unsets me. It takes me a long time, to translate, to hear the sounds of (m)other tongue. This foreignness traverses the space in-between my English and Greek languages. For when I say kairos, it brings forth the images of Greece, but I also feel an other’s syntax and grammar that unleashes a strangely familiar tone that surface across the opaque film of my languages; and my stories about place. It is this skin of language, as I try to find the words, the right (write) words, that open the fleshy fibres of this page. This language wraps itself around me like a second skin. This second skin, is the first skin of my language. I write through opaque and translucent languages. As I write I feel the touch of another’s hand. It is this kind of writing or scarring on my body that calls me when the Greek xenos, or strange-ness reverberates through these pages. For the xenos exists outside the inside of a language and culture, and it is this strangeness that haunts me.

The words I hear, call me forth, draw me into images, into an imagination that moves between and beyond my place. These images that fill the space of imagined and real relations to a place are the foreign sounds that fill my ears and speak through my mouth, and the white concrete scraping on my feet as I walk through the image of a cool, crystalline light of a blue summer’s evening in Greece. It is this kind of reverberating image, in its ‘dividedness’, the strangely familiar that opens up the space of my imagination — where the borders of text and life are interwoven into each other. It echoes the uncanny reverberation of my Greek kairos, where the in-animate (the silent word) is made animate in language (images of yellow and blue, the time of day, have you got the time?) In this way, a poetics of foreignness is about memory lived out in another sense of time and place. Where memories are entangled in the spaces of language, intimacy and places that travel through different languages and imaginary dwellings, and the distant geographies of far-off home-lands.
Journeys into Foreignness...

This thesis has been a journey through different dialogic and critical encounters. It has been in 'writing up' this thesis that I realise the important intersections between something called 'empirical research' and the practice of writing. Because when I began this dissertation, I started with an abstract search for something called foreignness. Although it reverberated deeply in my life, I did not have the 'boldness' nor the voice to write from and outside my own experience. It was only in the dialogic encounters I went through and in conversations that I had that I realised, after the fact, the pertinence of the analytic and conceptual framework that emerged. I had been searching for, unknown to me, how one could find a voice through writing and words. Because words for me have often been an impenetrable wall of silence — the words I speak in Greek and the voice I have found in English have haunted my psyche, my imagination and my critical writing.

Through analysing and interpreting the conversations and finding a voice through which to speak, the thesis has emerged piece by piece, so to speak, or fragment by fragment toward what I have called a poetics of foreignness. In a critical sense, I have been dealing with translation — multiple translations involved in reading another's words, from spoken to written texts, and through a poetics of foreignness. It has been the interconnections between different 'voices' that enabled me to bring together the 'shapeless' body of my theoretical musings and personal wanderings, and structure the body of this work on foreignness.

As a postscript, and in conclusion to this thesis, I want to suggest how a series of radio dialogues based on the conversations and produced in-between this writing and analysis, enact a different way of speaking and writing about foreignness, and are on-going translations into a critical imagination. When I undertook the series of radio dialogues three years after our initial conversations, I realised how they extended my own sense of cultural practice and dialogic encounters. ¹ In these dialogues, which are presented here as a supplement to this thesis, we embody 'our' written voices into the realm of sound. The radio conversations taught me something new about the practice of writing. The radio voices reframe, produce and enact what I have conceived of throughout this thesis as writing aloud and 'hearing otherwise'.

In this sense, the translations from speech to writing were further complicated in these new conversations. It now became a question of translating from writing into speech. In the radio conversations the process of translating back into the oral for an aural encounter produced a different understanding of image and voice. In my role as a new mediator for the conversations, I was involved in editing and scripting parts of the written conversations to be 'read' as spoken texts, and pursuing follow-up questions to repose and extend themes from our previous dialogue. ²

¹ Importantly, though, not all of the conversations are included in the radio work. Laleen Jayamanne, Elspeth Probyn and Denise Groves conversations were not produced for the radio broadcasts. This was due to questions of time, studio availability and their own availability and commitments.
² The template for the radio dialogues involved a short performance piece read by the contributors based on selected excerpts from previous, published dialogue, and a follow-up conversation based on themes raised in our initial encounters. Each radio program featuring one contributor lasted approximately thirty minutes, and the whole series took six months to produce. There are eight contributors and episodes in the radio series.
The notions of montage and poetics were conceptually important to how each of the conversations were edited and translated for radio. So here the voice comes back through a different image repertoire and the grain of the writing. In the process of editing the chapter excerpts, I had to re-imagine the speaking voices of my collaborators. In this respect, I had to create and navigate the conversational excerpt into a 'narrative' that would 'speak' to a new listener. The voice became the bearer of the image, and as Bachelard (1994) has noted, and I have already suggested, it is the reverberations of sound that call forth images and allow a poetic image to take 'root' in us. I have taken Bachelard's poetic imagination seriously in these translations. My editing and reworking of the conversations for an 'auditory space' were based on the rhythm of the voice, the texture of sound and finding a language that could speak a poetic imagination.

In this translation from writing into speech, I had to 'perform' different voices and to hear them, visually. That is, through a poetic imagination, the language evoked had to create visual image in the mind of the listener. As the silent words on the page had to resonate through my mouth — I had to speak them, and hear how they would be read by each person. Tracing this path, the writing involved the cinematic traces of language (what Barthes has called the cinematic capture of sound and speech close up): where the image of words, the voice, the breath, the pace and rhythm had to be created in the mind of the listener. I 'aurally' edited all of the excerpts — as each script was recorded I would play it back to myself, to 'hear' and speak the images in the text.

In radio, the voice of another can be rewritten through the process of 'cutting up' and cutting between voices. As the dialogues were produced for radio, the 'live' element of speech was worked on and through in the process of assembling each of the episodes. There is the capacity to invent new words from those that are 'spoken' — by cutting together different parts of words or sentences. In this regard, the possibility within sound is infinite and also 'betraying' — because all of the conversations were heavily edited, reworked and 'rewritten' for radio broadcast. For example, in the editing of the 'live' conversations we often used 'ums, ahs' where necessary to provide the grammatical 'conjugations' between the flow of ideas and the change in tenor or direction of a theme, but those 'hooks' that sounded 'too much' like speech were written out of the radio broadcast. Just like writing, speech can also involve processes of 'cleaning up' and rewriting. Here again the 'authenticity' of speech is already written by the fabric of technology and of translation.

Throughout this research and in all of the conversations, the notion of translation is at the heart of how different texts are read, heard and rewritten. But like speech, the radio broadcast is fleeting and ephemeral, so what cannot be captured is the written transcription of the recorded script. There is no time to revisit the words spoken, they move through space and time at a different speed to writing. In this regard, memory is worked via the image of the voice (a voice without a body) and resonates, literally, in the ear of the other. The intimacy of the radio voice is 'close up' to the ear, but heard in another place and inhabited by different bodies in time. In this process, I recognised how the theories on 'hearing' that I was exploring through my analysis and writing became materially embodied. I realised how writing always exists as a translation: the words or sounds that create images in the mind of the listener, are also the 'voices' or the hearing that are involved and necessary in reading and in writing. Because what exists between thought and the text are these images and voices,
which speak and reverberate the languages of thinking and of being. In writing, the images that resonate, the sounds of ‘writing aloud’ as Barthes has noted, are the spaces of the imagination that are heard in the hand that writes and the voice that reads.

In the staging of the ‘performance’ piece for radio, each writer inhabited their text again and gave them ‘their voice’ — in the same uncanny way that a writer or reader re-animates the silent words on a page. And through these strangely familiar encounters we met again — through intimate face to face encounters or through the distance of international hook-ups across worlds, hemispheres and time zones, in Sydney, Michigan, London, Vancouver and Paris. The new instance of communication extended the basis of our dialogues and the themes that were discussed. In sense, we had the opportunity to revisit and discuss, pick up and extend themes that were raised in the initial conversations. Thus what can be now heard are the supplements, the voices that extend and flesh out themes previously discussed around foreignness, memory, life and writing.

In the realm of a different kind of hearing, this thesis ends with a new beginning — inviting the reader, writer and listener to inhabit the text according to the different postures they embody. The strange and the familiar come together here through the voices which were read now becoming the voices that can be heard and vice-versa. Because in faith and friendship we continue to explore the multiple ways to think, write and hear foreignness. And what I hope resonates in the aftermath of these conversations is the on-going possibilities of dialogue, translation and a critical imagination — foreignness in practice.
I can only write with my ears —

flesh bathed in the body of another's words...
Appendix
The Writers, Intellectuals and Film-makers Who Were Interviewed.

The interviews took place between April 1996 and January 1998. This included the first interviews and the subsequent follow-up conversations and translations undertaken for the written component of this thesis. In addition to the information and associated readings given in Part One and Part Two, I give details here of how the interviews were conducted and a description of the interviewees’ work within their respective critical and theoretical environments.

The criterion for the selection of the interviewees was based on how their writing or cultural work intersected with personal and critical experiences of living and writing as foreigners or associated issues of migration and theorisations of identity. As stated in Part One, the interviews were selected to provide a diverse range of intellectual traditions and writing perspectives. The theoretical traditions and perspectives include: philosophy, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, literary theory, poetry, post-colonial theory, queer theory, feminist studies, autobiographical writing and film. The diversity of the whole group in terms of intellectual tradition, cultural background and personal experience was closely monitored in order to test the limits and possibilities of how foreignness could be understood in contemporary critical writing. (Some of the similarities and differences between the writers and their perspectives are outlined in Part One.)

Each of the interviewees was contacted and told of the parameters of my research project. The interviewees were first contacted either by a letter, phone call or email. The interviews were undertaken face-to-face or by phone link-ups (Part Two outlines the place and form of each encounter). The conversations varied in length and time. On average the conversations lasted one to two hours (with the exception of Alphonso Lingis which was seven hours in length). All the conversations required follow-up questions and translations. The follow-up correspondences varied in degree and time (between three to five further encounters were undertaken). These correspondences involved email, fax, phone and face-to-face exchanges. The interview with Julia Kristeva was sent to a translator and this involved two separate written correspondences and editing consultations.

Each of the contributors was notified of the other participants throughout the research gathering and final versions of the project. In this process, we established clear frameworks for the questions/proposed discussions and my role in gathering the research was stipulated.
The supplementary radio dialogues and contacts took place between October 1998 and March 1999. The radio dialogues were based on the final interview material and research gathered. Eight of the original interviewees participated in the radio dialogues. Each of the participants was contacted via the email or phone. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or by international phone links at the ABC radio studios in Sydney, Australia.

List of the interviewees, the date and place of the first interview:

Sneja Gunew, Vancouver, 6/5/96.
Laleen Jayamanne, Sydney, 11/9/96.
Elspeth Probyn, Sydney, 12/9/96.
Ien Ang, Sydney, 10/11/96.
Denise Groves, Perth, 9/12/96.
Trinh T. Minh-ha, Sydney/California, 16/12/96.
Renata Salecl, Sydney/Ljubljana, 13/1/97.

Julia Kristeva

Julia Kristeva is Professor of Texts and Documents at the University of Paris VII and is a practising psychoanalyst. Kristeva grew up in Bulgaria and migrated to France in the mid 1960s. Her writing has been influenced by this migration experience. Kristeva’s critical and literary works emerge from a psychoanalytic and semiotic tradition. Apart from her work on foreignness and otherness, she has substantially reworked Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis. Moreover, she has been influenced by the Russian writer Mikhail Bakhtin and has extended his seminal work on the ‘dialogic imagination’. In this regard, Kristeva’s writing can be placed within literary and psychoanalytic reworkings of identity and concepts of the self. Kristeva’s understandings of the self and identity have provided an important basis for contemporary feminist writing. Kristeva’s work can be situated within the ‘French Feminist’ tradition, and this tradition has been adopted in Anglo-American feminist contexts. Her recent fictional work has involved the integration of narrative and critical analysis.
Eva Hoffman

Eva Hoffman is a non-fiction writer based in London. She has worked as a book editor for *The New York Times* and writes regularly on culture and literature for various publications. Hoffman grew up in Poland and migrated to Canada with her family in her early teenage years. Her work can be situated as autobiographical and historical narrativisations of migrant experience. Hoffman’s writing has dealt specifically with the experience of migration, translation and the impacts of this on her Jewish identity and history. She explicitly deals with the question of memory and history, and the need to incorporate the multiple layers and realities that have framed historical events such as the Holocaust. Hoffman's autobiographical considerations of the self and experience have been useful for feminist, literary and cultural theorisations of identity.

Alphonso Lingis

Alphonso Lingis is Professor of Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University, USA. Lingis' parents were Lithuanian migrants and he grew up in the United States. Lingis' comes from a phenomenological philosophical tradition (he has been the translator of Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Merleau-Ponty). In the last thirty years, he has reworked this philosophical framework and developed extensive themes around psychoanalysis, philosophy and ethics. Lingis' recent writing reflects his travelling experiences and these have concentrated on the interconnections between philosophy and everyday life. In this regard, his writing has been influential in philosophical, cultural and anthropological traditions.

Sneja Gunew

Sneja Gunew is Professor of Women’s Studies and English at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Gunew grew up in Australia, and has recently migrated to Canada. The experience of growing up as a foreigner in Australia has influenced her critical writing and theorisations of identity. Gunew's work can be located within feminist and literary scholarships, and post-colonial theorisations of migrant experience. Gunew's work has focused on the situated analyses of multicultural writing and multiculturalism in Australia, North American and Canadian contexts. She has also written in ficto-critical form and she often works between critical and fictional modes.
Antigone Kefala

Antigone Kefala is poet and writer based in Sydney. Kefala grew up in Romania, and has lived in Greece, New Zealand and Australia. She describes her life as a ‘travelling landscape’ and this has influenced the style of her writing and the themes she has explored. Kefala uses poetical devices, collage and montage as a way to communicate these experiences in her writing. This style has influenced the aesthetic and creative expression of literary writing in the Australian context. Kefala’s work is committed to working between languages and presenting the diversity of this in Greek and English. In this regard, she has recently published a bi-lingual edition of her book Absence.

Laleen Jayamanne

Laleen Jayamanne is a lecturer in Cinema Studies at the University of Sydney. Jayamanne grew up in Sri Lanka, she has lived in New York and she currently lives in Australia. She is film-maker, critic and cultural theorist. Jayamanne’s film work and critical writings have emerged from the intersections of cross-cultural experience and avant-garde film. Her work has influenced feminist and avant-garde cinema in Australian and international contexts. She works to present a mimetic form of cinema and cultural representation. Jayamanne’s writing can be located within the literatures of feminist, post-colonial and screen studies.

Elspeth Probyn

Elspeth Probyn is Associate Professor of Gender Studies (formerly Women’s Studies) at the University of Sydney. Probyn grew up in Wales, lived in Canada for most of her adult life and has recently migrated to Australia. Some of these experiences have framed what she has called ‘outside belongings’. Probyn comes from a North American cultural studies and feminist tradition, and her work intersects with contemporary queer theory and politics. Probyn’s writing has derived from close reworkings of post-structural writers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In recent years, her focus has been on challenging essentialist accounts of gay and lesbian identities.
Ien Ang

Ien Ang is Director of the Research In Intercommunal Studies at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean and is Professor of Cultural Studies. Ang was born in Indonesia, she has lived in Holland and the United States, and now lives in Sydney. Ang’s theoretical work has emerged from a distinctive analysis of media audiences. In this regard, Ang’s work has been situated within cultural and media studies. Over the last decade or so, her work has involved a sustained critique of identity and questions of nationhood. Ang’s autobiographical and critical work on identity has related specifically to challenging essentialist discourses of ‘Chineseness’ in Western and non-Western contexts. Ang’s work can be situated within contemporary post-colonial and cultural studies’ traditions.

Denise Groves

Denise Groves has taught at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. Groves grew up in Marble Bar, Western Australia. Within the Australian context, her writing challenges stereotypes around urban/traditional representations of Aboriginal identity. Groves’ writing can be situated within Aboriginal studies and post-colonial theorisations of identity. Her writing is influenced by post-colonial writers such as Homi Bhabha and Trinh T. Minh-ha. Groves’ writing represents the new discourses of ‘Aboriginality’.

Trinh T. Minh-ha

Trinh T. Minh-ha is Professor of Film, Women’s Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley. Trinh has lived in Vietnam, France, Germany and Spain, she currently lives in the United States. Trinh’s film practice and writing can be situated within feminist and post-colonial studies. Her work has concentrated on challenging anthropological accounts of third world women. Through her writing and film practice she has provided unique representations of third world women and has challenged essentialist accounts of identity and foreign experience.

Renata Salecl

Renata Salecl is a lecturer of Sociology at Ljubljana University, Slovenia. Salecl grew up in Slovenia and has lived in the United States. Salecl is a sociologist, philosopher and criminologist. Her work can be positioned within the psychoanalytic and feminist traditions that have emerged out of the collapse of socialism in Eastern
Europe. Salecl's work has been strongly influenced by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Her work has contested traditional psychoanalytic and political theorisations of identity and nationhood in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, her psychoanalytic and critical work has challenged Western discourses of liberalism and multiculturalism.
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning the following pages. The best possible results have been obtained.
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Foreign Dialogues:
Part One: ‘Life in a New Language’ — Eva Hoffman. 29min: 36s
Part Two: ‘By the Roadside’ — Antigone Kefala. 29min: 32s
Part Three: ‘Scent, Sound and Cinema’ — Trinh T. Minh-ha. 28min: 11s
Part Four: ‘Spoils of Freedom’ — Renata Salecl. 29min: 39s
Part Five: ‘Reinventing Selves’ — Sneja Gunew. 29min: 34s.
Part Six: ‘Senses of Revolt’ — Julia Kristeva. 29min: 10s.
Part Seven: ‘Out of Bounds’ — Ien Ang. 28min: 24s
Part Eight: ‘Foreign Bodies’ — Alphonso Lingis. 29min: 53s