

**LITERATURE, NATURE, CITIZENSHIP, AND GLOBAL FLOWS: OF
TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSCULTURAL CROSSROADS**

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ABSTRACT: This essay problematizes the relationship between literature, nature and citizenship in our digital culture. By focusing on the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization in connection with the tension between belonging to a national place and being mobile in transnational space, it deals with the following questions and issues: What is the meaning of identity and citizenship in the digital age of cybernations and netizens? How does literary representation render the cultural construction of the human-machine/ human-nature interface? How does literature translate and negotiate the disruptive in-between zone of inter- and intracultural disjunctures and conjunctures—the place where diverse histories, customs, values, beliefs and cognitive systems are contested and interwoven—as inhabited place, that is, as *affective geography* (Soja)? What are the theoretical tools to map and measure this inhabited contact zone? In the process of giving tentative and partial answers, this essay elaborates a link between the *political unconscious* (Jameson), the *cultural unconscious* (Bourdieu) and the *ecological unconscious* (Walter) of the human-machine/ human-nature interface that surfaces in contemporary multi-ethnic writing; a *transwriting* (Walter) that, in the face of natural catastrophes, instantiates a decolonizing attitude towards nature by delineating new forms of cohabitation involving the entire biota.

KEYWORDS: Literature; Nature; Citizenship; Globalization; Digital culture.

RESUMO: Este ensaio problematiza a relação entre literatura, natureza e cidadania na nossa cultura digital. Ao focalizar a tensão entre a homogeneização e heterogeneização cultural em conexão com a tensão entre o pertencimento a um lugar nacional e a mobilidade num espaço transnacional, ele trata

das seguintes perguntas e assuntos: O que significam identidade e cidadania na época digital das cibernações e cidadãos conectados? Como é que a representação literária transmite a construção cultural da interface entre o ser humano e a máquina por um lado e o ser humano e a natureza por outro? Como é que a literatura traduz e negocia a entre-zona de disjunturas e conjunturas inter e intraculturais — o lugar onde diversas histórias, hábitos, valores, crenças e sistemas cognitivos são contestados e entrelaçados — como lugar habitado, ou seja, como *geografia afetiva* (Soja)? Quais são os instrumentos teóricos para mapear e medir esta zona de contacto habitada? No processo de dar respostas tentativas e parciais, este ensaio elabora uma conexão entre o *inconsciente político* (Jameson), o *inconsciente cultural* (Bourdieu) e o *inconsciente ecológico* (Walter) da interface acima mencionada que se encontra na escrita multiétnica contemporânea; uma *transescrita* (Walter) que, diante das catástrofes naturais representa uma atitude descolonizadora para com a natureza no sentido de delinear novas formas de coabitação que envolve a biota inteira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Literatura; Natureza; Cidadania; Globalização; Cultura digital;

Let me begin with the double hypothesis of this paper. First, globalization produces a consumerism where local differences are effaced and an ethics that recognizes and valorizes the right to be culturally different. This tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization has to be seen in connection with the tension between belonging to a national place and being mobile in transnational space. Thus, at the heart of this double constraint of the structures of capital worlding and cultural belonging the aporia seems to lie precisely in the necessity humanity faces, and the impossibility it struggles against, of collectively imagining a new form of citizenship, a new image of the relation between rooted and routed membership in a community; that is, between a national and a transnational, diasporic identity. Second, if words render the world a recognizable space composed of home places, that is, if the power of words resides in the fact that words through memory recuperate

a world of references that (re)constitutes identity in a historical process, then it is through words in literature that visions and alter-visions of citizenship are traced, or rather culturally translated. Thus, it is in literary representation that possibilities of cultural transformation reside since it reveals the fissures of cultural fusions (and vice versa); that which does not make sense because of its incommensurability and/or contradictory complementarity. In this sense, the signification of literature resides in its art of interruption. In other words, literary narration is less an arrival than a perpetual departure; a journey that renders previous understanding and comprehension *unheimlich*. The home of literature, then, is the possibility of new utopias through the articulation of different worldings: diverse knowledges, worldviews, forms of relationship, etc. In this sense, literature constitutes a crossroads where subjectivities and identities are formed and performed.

The following questions and issues link the two hypotheses: What is the meaning of identity and citizenship in the digital age of cybernations and netizens? What is the relation between the virtual spaces of computer and media networks and forms and practices of ethnicity that are emerging from transnational *ethnoscapes* (Appadurai) or flows of displaced peoples and workforces across national boundaries? If the conditions of globalization are not only capitalism and imperialism, but the link between human beings, the machine and the environment, then it is necessary to take into account the cultural construction of the human-machine/ human-nature interface and, as literary critics and cultural workers, to ask how literary representation renders this interface. In other words, how does literature translate and negotiate the disruptive in-between zone of inter- and intracultural disjunctures and conjunctures— the place where diverse histories, customs, values, beliefs and cognitive systems are contested and interwoven— as inhabited place, that is, as *affective geography* (Soja)? What are the theoretical tools to map and measure this inhabited contact zone? In the process of giving tentative and partial answers, this essay will elaborate a link between the

political unconscious (Jameson), the *cultural unconscious* (Bourdieu) and the *ecological unconscious* (Walter) of the human-machine/ human-nature interface that surfaces in contemporary multi-ethnic writing; a *transwriting* (Walter) that, in the face of natural catastrophes, instantiates a decolonizing attitude towards nature by delineating new forms of cohabitation involving the entire biota.

Following James Clifford (1997: 1), among others, our present times are characterized by a “new world order of mobility, of histories without roots.” According to Arjun Appadurai (1996: 33-36, 43) this new order is composed of flows of people, objects, ideas, ideologies, messages, images, products — “ethnoscapes,” “technoscapes,” “ideoscapes,” “finanscapes,” and “mediascapes,” — flows being constituted by and constituting a complex network of conjunctive and disjunctive relations. These flows create “cultural forms shaped in a fractal way” that undermine fixed notions of the nation and the subject. Thus, diverse types of migration, displacement, exile, and diaspora — imagined communities beyond common origins, local traditions and geographical and linguistic borders — constitute a heightened contemporary mobility caused by economic necessity, neoliberal capitalism, natural disaster, political instability as well as by effects of the colonial past.

This new world order of permeable borders and borderlands also involves a shift from the nation-state to a transnational market-state, that is, the displacement of the state as the most significant aggregation of power by corporations. We are witnessing a planetary increase in the submission of human beings and nature to the control and exploration of the best market with the highest possible profit based on ever-increasing consumption. This shift caused by the dominance of economic over political and cultural forces, for example, has an enormous impact on education. In an article on this subject, Cristian Laval (2011: 4-5) argues

that schools, universities, the entire pedagogical system is based on and determined by the economic world: results are not measured in terms of quality but quantity.¹²

This shift is also a cultural one: nation-states are losing their cultural coherence by dint of planetary communication systems. Satellite technology and the Internet bring all media across national boundaries rendering problematic the figure of the citizen as a member of a national community. The rise of social networks such as MySpace, Twitter and Facebook represents a further expansion of the circle of producers constituting the participative World Wide Web initiated by the blog platforms. This implicit shift from the private to the public is based on the interest to increase the circulation of messages, comments, discussions, news, publications ... and profit. Nowadays the objective is the mediatization of the word and writing. This increase in production and communication, however, raises several questions: how do we separate the wheat from the chaff in this vast amount of information and writings? Confronted with bits and pieces, fragments uprooted from their specific context and presented by professionals and non-professionals, do we risk being grounded in a continuous, immediate, and depthless present? Does that mean that our memory is vanishing even more from its past *milieu*, to use Pierre Nora's term, into virtual *lieux*? If citizenship depends on individual and collective recollection to be articulated, then the media, in becoming memory, are central to the performance of an imagined collectivity. The question then is, what does the media's seemingly transparent syntax obscure, negate, distort and why? Furthermore, and I think most importantly, how do these fluxes impact on our consciousness, our identity, and our ways of relating with each other and our environment. In this disjunctive conjuncture of economic, political, and cultural aspects of contemporary globalization we need to reconfigure not only the position of the subject, his/her *I-slot* in a given society to use Foucault's term, but most importantly the relationship between the citizen and his

¹² On this issue, see also Sousa (2011).

environment; that is, the subject's dis-placement within his/her geographical and virtual place and space. If our transnational and transcultural epoch is mainly characterized by heightened forms and practices of mobility and new media usage, I urge us to consider both the human-machine interface and the human-geography interface in the making of what some have called *netizens* and other forms of diasporic citizenship: citizens adhering to machines and to multiple places, to routes rather than roots. This double adherence has an impact on identity formation and our way of thinking, acting and relating in that it creates not only new types of transnational citizenship, but also new ways of inhabiting places and spaces.

Mark Poster (2002: 101) suggests that digital networks transform the citizen into a "netizen [...] the formative figure in a new kind of political relation, one that shares allegiance to the nation with allegiance to the Internet and to the planetary spaces it inaugurates." He sees the Internet as a site of conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, it is used as an instrument to reinforce existing territorial politics — for example, in the struggle of the Zapatistas in Southern Mexico. On the other hand, the Internet fosters a new kind of postnational politics that deterritorializes nations and creates free-flowing interactions not tied to regional or national identities. More recently, in what has been termed the Arab Spring and the Occupy Wall Street Movements, social networks have had an important role in coordinating protest activities as well as in conditioning spontaneous action by transmitting pictures and comments about closed local realities. Thus, the new media constitutes a new digital power network, investing the netizen with power defined in terms of technological extensions of cognition, distributed global systems, and ever-increasing connectivity. In this sense, Katherine Hayles (2002: 118) wonders whether this digital culture leads to "more equitable, just, and democratic practices" or whether "the concept of the netizen" would not "reinscribe power differentials that correspond to technological development, associating the more technologically developed netizens with a more developed form of humanity." "Is the

netizen,” she asks, “necessarily more politically progressive?” Furthermore, if the machines of digital culture economize mechanical work, then, we could ask, whether they transform us into incomplete beings? Does digital culture based on the mutual penetration of the mechanization of the mind and the spiritualization of the machine, then, reduce our forces of attention as well as our manual and mental capacities? Are we becoming zombies of what Sartre has once memorably termed the “pratico-inert”?¹³ And, finally, what does that mean in terms of citizenship? Does digital culture lead us toward a more participatory democracy or is netizenship based on subjects functioning as key informers for communication or administrative marketing strategists? In other words, do online piracy, copyright violations, and data mining¹⁴ infringe on our individual liberty to control our destiny?

I want to briefly come back to the idea of becoming incomplete subjects by means of our increasing dependence upon machines. Not only do we move further away from an organic type of lived memory in our daily affairs, what Nora has termed *le milieu de mémoire*, but I am firmly convinced that our general fascination with images and the widespread implicit spectacularization of events and facts transform us into forgetful human beings unable to remember the context in which these events and facts happen and, in a more general way, into subjects alienated from the rest of the biota. In front of the screen, touching and clicking, we inhabit a virtual space with shifting virtual identities and forget how to live in harmony with the rest of the biota. Before I will elaborate this idea, let me give you a short summary of what Lucien Sève (2006) has argued with regard to humanity in the XXI century. In his problematization of an endangered humanity, Sève delineates five basic characteristics

¹³ The “object-vampire” that “absorbs human action, lives on man’s blood and finally lives in symbiosis with him” (SARTRE, 1960: 238). The “pratico-inert” is matter, the machine and social institutions, but also any object that alienates, fragments, and objectifies man. Translations in this essay are mine.

¹⁴ Analyses based on the traces we leave while clicking and surfing the web space. It serves as trendsetters for consumption and thus production since it examines our habits. Data mining, then, is a good example of how difficult it is to control social networks. Furthermore, it demonstrates one of the new media’s principal objectives: “an epistemological desire to translate the external world into a unified field of vision” (CHAMBERS, 2002: 26).

of our global digital world. First, a generalized commodification: what started with the transformation of the human work force into a commodity and the implicit personification of things has become a general tendency. Second, a decline in human values in a world and civilization characterized by an economic system based on continual growth and unfettered expansion. Third, a universalization of nonsense. With the eruption of finance capitalism and the substitution of democracy for the private order we entered an era of short-term projects with no time for a reflection and digestion of their possible negative effects. Fourth, a reduction of class consciousness to such a degree that subjects have lost the capacity to know their place in society. Finally, the systematic obstruction of alternatives by a system of consumption and spectacularization.

Whether we accept Sève's apocalyptic vision totally, partially, or not at all is an open question. By juxtaposing Hayles' problematization of Poster's somewhat positive delineation of the netizen and Sève's negative vision of the contemporary world order and Western civilization I am interested in the fragmentation and alienation of human beings in our digital culture. In the following sections I want to elaborate this point by focusing on the relation between human beings and the rest of the biota from the perspective of literary studies embedded in cultural theory.

In the wake of heightened transnational exchanges, critical discourse — inspired by the nomad form of transborder thinking that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1976) proposed in order to link roots with rhizomes — discovered the differential logic of contact zones to explain and problematize the conjunctive and disjunctive flows of cultural transference and their results: new fractal cultural forms and practices between and within permeable borders. In this sense, Wilson Harris (1983) used the term "*cross-culturality*", Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) examined a 'new mestiza consciousness' in the Chicano borderlands, Néstor García Canclini (1990) wrote about "*culturas híbridas*" in the Americas, Édouard

Glissant (1992, 1997, 2002, 2006) analyzed the new world order with terms such as “*créolisation*” and “*poétique de la relation*,” Ulf Hannerz (1996) problematized “*transnational connections*,” and Sérgio Gruzinski “*la pensée métisse*.” Together with Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and Silvia Spitta (1996), among others, I have argued that the best way to analyze these fractal forms and practices — their ambiguous, multidimensional and heterotopic nature — is in places and spaces of transcultural exchange. As ‘trans’ of the transitional nature of cultural identity the process of transculturation translates the cultural logic that informs and structures cultural mixture.

In *Narrative Identities: (Inter)Cultural In-Betweenness in the Americas* (2003), I have problematized the term ‘transculturation’ in critical dialogue with Fernando Ortiz, who coined the term in the 1940s, Nancy Morejón (1982), Angel Rama (1982) and Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1996). I have argued that in a transcultural process identity is constructed through the negotiation of difference based on the presence of fissures, lacunae and contradictions and that it is through the analysis of this process that we can map the role of cultural difference and the contradictions inherent in the construction of identity. Transculturation, I have asserted, should be understood

as a multivalent mode and paradigm encompassing an uneasy dialogue between synthesis and symbiosis, continuity and rupture, coherence and fragmentation, utopia and dystopia, consensus and incommensurability, deconstruction and reconstruction. A dialogue, that is, between hegemonic and counterhegemonic forces and practices, between gestures, acts, and strategies of coercion, expropriation and (re)appropriation, which discriminates between diverse categories: imposed or willed assimilation, internalized self-contempt, and diverse forms of resistance such as mimicry and transwriting (WALTER, 2003: 363).

Thus, the process of transculturation opens and constitutes a space and dialogue between diverse cultural elements in which the sociocultural agency of alterity is inscribed. Alterity, then, is not an image, a fixed copy within an episteme (ethos/worldview), but exists (and therefore should be analyzed) within a contact zone where it relates to identity in process and new identitarian forms and practices emerge from the multiple tensions inherent in this negotiation. That is, in a transcultural process there is no stable, fixed signification. What exists, instead, is a force that explodes fixed structures and functions comparable to the interplay of (under)water (currents) and sand: unexplainable in terms of the total make-up of its elements and final results.

As such, transculturation is a critical paradigm enabling us to trace the ways transmission occurs within and between different cultures, regions, and nations. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, as a mediator of the disruptive in-between zone of inter and intracultural disjunctures and conjunctures — the space where diverse histories, customs, values, and cognitive systems are contested and interwoven without their different representations being dissolved into each other — transculturation maps the local and global production and interplay of difference and sameness rooted and routed in diverse forms and practices of domination within hegemonic systems characterized by unequal relations of power. Transculturation, then, constitutes (the basis of) a transborder hermeneutics that measures the multivoiced encounter of cultural elements in writing, speech, and comprehension. I am using the Bakhtinian term here on purpose because a multivoiced dialogue embraces identity and alterity in a tension-laden relationship that keeps both on the move. In the process of seeing myself (and thus existing) through the other, by letting the other in and moving out toward the other, that is, simultaneously recognizing and dealing with the exterior and interior other and his/her perspectives/visions, etc., I firmly believe, resides the foundation of an intersubjective and intercultural relation and translation: a process of

mutual representation in which the ‘I’ unfolds into its ‘I’s’ through the perception and acceptance of being represented in and by the other and vice versa within complex intercultural transferences at the crossroads of the local and the global.

Transculture and its implicit processes of transcultural exchange have an impact on the diverse fluxes of globalization. These fluxes, whether defined as “the intensification of social world relations that connect distant places in such a way that local events are shaped by those happening in a distance of many miles and vice-versa” (GIDDENS, 1990: 64), as cultural, economic and technological processes (ORTIZ, 1996: 29), or as a conglomeration of forces and practices against what Naomi Klein (2002: 126) calls “the increase of cooperative control over education, water, scientific research” — the neoliberal politics of social dumping — introduce the terms of deterritorialization, reterritorialization and diaspora into the framework of local and global culture. In other words, our contemporary phase of globalization is nourished by the tension between cohesion and dispersal, stable roots and rhizomic routes, homogenization and heterogenization, closed and permeable borders. In cultural terms, we could consider globalization a crossroads mediated by transculturation: the diverse forms and practices, by means of which cultural elements meet, mix and renew each other in the local/global space.

To be able to examine this crossroads of our digital-diasporic transculture cultural workers ought to work on the hyphen linking phenomena and scientific fields. I am deeply convinced that only a comparative and interdisciplinary approach enables us to understand not all, but some aspects of intercultural relations. This brings me to the issue of literature and its role in intercultural research.

Literature is one of the privileged means of collective mythological construction. It can be seen as a crossroads where conflictive and competitive discourses, visions, values, myths, histories and translations meet and are negotiated. It is through literature as mnemonic

site that writers re-create the myths necessary to establish themselves as native subjects in a specific place. Moreover, the (re)appropriation of space via (literary) memory facilitates the location of the subject in his/her history. Renaming one's place, rewriting one's history through literary representation means reconstructing one's identity, taking control of one's culture. In the process, especially in the case of subalternized ethnic groups, it can become a means of resistance to what Gayatri Spivak has once memorably termed *epistemic violence* — a violence that has its roots in the past and writes endless chapters in the present. Literature, then, shapes ideas, ideals and belief systems contributing to the constitution of a collective cultural episteme. A comparative and interdisciplinary literary analysis, I believe, provides insight into the diverse types of cultural identity formation in our digital-diasporic times. Let me trace three types of insight I have in mind: a) insight into anthropocentric assumptions: the relation between the sense of place and the ethical consciousness (ethical reflection); b) insight into the cultural episteme as lived human experience within an inhabited place and its historical process (ontological/identitarian reflection); c) insight into the relation between writing, life, and pedagogical practices (ideological reflection). Based on its power to cause what Wolfgang Iser (1978) and Gaston Bachelard (1969) have analyzed as process of “ideation” within the reader's mind and Paulo Freire has termed the process of “conscientization,” literature has the potential to reveal alternative forms of intersubjective relation with others — animals, plants, humans, in short, the entire biota — and thus to contribute to cultural transformation. Given the fact that one of the principal problems to be resolved in the 21st Century is the coexistence of diverse, often radically different cultures and that literature problematizes the aporias of life through its representation, I argue that literary criticism, together with its object of study, literature, ought to constitute a science that transmits respect for and understanding of the many others that constitute the entire biota,

including human beings; a science, to use Glissant's memorable words, that reactivates an "aesthetics of the earth" (1997: 150-151).

Let me explain Glissant's term by way of a detour; that is, through an emblematic passage from Caribbean writer Patrick Chamoiseau's *Biblique des derniers gestes*. Chamoiseau seems to agree with Toni Morrison (2003: 4) that today's world is a place "[w]here all is known and nothing understood." Therefore, according to Chamoiseau (2002: 185, 526) it is necessary to "understand the secret meaning of the world" and "reconnect the symbols"; a process of consciousness-raising and identity (re)construction initiated through individual and collective imagination, intuition and memory:

It is necessary to know [...] how to imagine the world, the places, invent the histories! [...] Invent this foundational memory that one cultivates deep in one's heart and that dictates its principle of openness to the powers of this world! Learn how to do this! For each place, each hut, each woman imagine their prolongations in the constellations of places, huts [...] or perfumes; one calling the other, the other present in a thousand others. Proceed like this, wandering from prolongation to prolongation until you feel the most human possible! (CHAMOISEAU, 2002: 278-279)

This type of living memory as social practice becomes a means of understanding and actively shaping the past within the present pointing towards the future. As such, it is a possible site from which to remap the world. In other words, a translation of cultural difference as separation into cultural diversity as relation begins with a process of consciousness-raising and moves outward through imagination. Memory in Chamoiseau, then, explodes linear monocultural epistemes into fractal transcultural ones, constituting "an open, circular and living organism" (CHAMOISEAU, 2002: 471) that includes the entire

biota of different places, spaces, and cultural contexts, but also differences within the species. Plants, trees, animals, and human beings, all elements of the ecosystem are interrelated in rhizomic ways through displacement, that is, mobility and transformation.

In the light of reality-in-process, the act of writing cannot possibly translate a stable, fixed truth. Therefore, the aim of storytelling is not to explain something but to illuminate and confirm the impossible, incomprehensible, unthinkable and unspeakable. It reveals the other of and within the same through possibilities of never-ending displacements, prolongations, and desires. This image of creation as an ongoing search inscribes it in the process of displacement, which explodes systemic limits by working through intercultural fusion and fissure and thereby opening up diverse horizons of free, errant development. Circles of fissure and fusion, rupture and continuity: a transwriting imbued with an undecidability that locates identity in a fluid time-space continuum.

Yet any deterritorialization, as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, 1996) as well as Avtar Brah (1996), among others have convincingly argued, is tangled up with reterritorialization. Every departure is linked, if only temporarily, with an arrival: movement as home and/or in search of home. Thus, besides space we also have to think about place.

Place can be defined in a geographic, ecological, phenomenological (linking body and place) and genealogical (linking ancestry and territory) way in terms of empire expansion, urbanization and loss of nature, among others. If according to Henri Lefebvre (1974) spaces are perceived, conceived and lived, that is, if they are both real and imagined, and if according to Claude Raffestin (1980) territoriality is a specific type of space delimited by the subjects' agency, then I argue that the demarcation of space with its implicit places results from cartographic mapping as well as from the semiotic system of language and its associated images. For Bill Ashcroft (2001: 156) "place is a result of habitation, a consequence of the ways people inhabit a space." Yet the way people inhabit a place — their imaginary, cultural

episteme, language, habits, etc. — is also determined by this place. Space becomes simultaneously the form of our lived experiences and the image of its contents. This means that belonging to a place is less determined by our possessions in terms of property than by the relation between our ruptured selective memory and lived experience. Based on this double meaning of space as geographical entity and sociocultural production, I argue that any spatial analysis ought to examine the intrinsic and extrinsic signification of space, that is, its own vectors and the sociocultural, political and economic ramifications in which ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘gender’, ‘age’, and ‘class’ among other social vectors contribute to the constitution of the environmental experience: how, in other words, ‘natural’ histories are profoundly rooted in themselves and at the same time in local and global processes of world history.

By highlighting the production of history in the (post/neo)colonial process of worldly remapping postcolonial studies have used the concept of place to problematize temporal narratives of progress imposed by colonial powers. In this sense, ‘place’ codifies time, suggesting that histories rooted in the land and the sea have always furnished vital and dynamic methodologies for the understanding of the transformative impact of empire and the anticolonial epistemologies which empire tries to negate and suppress. Emphasizing the importance of history as a determinant of present events has been one of the primary means of postcolonial studies and critics such as Paulo Freire, Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, among others, argued that it is absolutely crucial for our understanding of space. Yet all of these postcolonial thinkers did privilege the sociocultural network of power relations over ecological concerns. By applying a historicized spatiotemporal epistemology to literary analysis, I contend, we have to engage in dialogue with the environment. This historical dialogue is necessary because the cultural process of separating nature from history contributed to the mystification of the colonial histories of

forced migration, genocide, suffering and violence. Multi-ethnic writers from the Americas, for example, have shown in their literary creations that the land and the sea are participants in the diverse historical processes of colonization instead of passive spectators. Writers such as Tomson Highway, Thomas King, Dionne Brand, Margaret Atwood, T.C. Boyle, Toni Morrison, Linda Hogan, Orlando Romero, Miguel Méndez, William Faulkner, Alejo Carpentier, Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Derek Walcott, Nicolás Guillen, Juan Rulfo, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, José María Arguedas, Pablo Neruda, Graciliano Ramos, Clarice Lispector, and Adonias Filho, among many others, demonstrate in their creative works that time does not pass, but accumulates through a relational biota whose elements are constituted through an interior value instead of one attributed from the outside. The past continues to exist in the present not because it appears on paper — this would mean its absence in the presence of signs — but because it is inscribed in the mind and body of diverse biotic elements. In this sense, it is useful to recall the term “affective geography” coined by Edward Soja (1989: 7) by which he meant “the concretization of social relations embedded in spatiality.” According to Soja, the importance of this type of spatial analysis resides in the mapping of what he has called “unjust geographies” (2009): how nature and culture in their complex interrelation are an integral part of unequal geographic developments. Geography — nature, landscape, place and space —, then, has to be reconceptualized as socially produced through hegemonic relations of power in the spatiotemporal interface of the here and there, the local and the global. In other words, human beings, their historical, cultural, political and economic affairs, and their environment are entangled in one unified and mutually reciprocal entity.

How can we translate this to literary criticism? As a tentative answer, let me trace a link between the political unconscious, the cultural unconscious and the ecological unconscious of fictional texts. If according to Fredric Jameson (1981: 64) “every literature

[...] is imbued with what we call a political unconscious [...] every literature has to be read as a symbolic meditation of a collective destiny” and if for Pierre Bourdieu (1977) every group/tribe/society is determined by a cultural unconscious, or *habitus* — with both notions being conceived in social stratification, that is within a hegemonic system characterized by forms and practices of domination, subalternization and resistance — then I argue that we can add what I term the ‘ecological unconscious’ as a third notion for a theoretical approach. Analogous to Jameson’s definition of the political unconscious as the simultaneously absent and present because desired cultural revolution that would transform our unjust hegemonic system into a more humane one, I define the ecological unconscious as the simultaneously absent and present because desired ecological revolution that would transform our vision of and relation within the biotic system.

This ecological transformation, which constitutes a new biotic ethics, is necessarily based on a change of our cultural imagination, on what Lawrence Buell (2001: 170) calls a “compromise of reinhabitation” that “implies an extension of a moral and sometimes even legal position to the nonhuman world.” In terms of Glissant’s “aesthetics of the earth” this compromise calls for a substitution of the corrosive and destructive episteme “humanism (as notion of the privileged human being)” (GLISSANT, 1992: 74) for an egalitarian “planetary conscience” (GLISSANT 1997: 164-165)” that includes “the language of landscape” (1992: 146). This all-inclusive conscience has been marvelously expressed by Hin-ma-too-yah-lat-kekht (Chief Joseph) in 1877 when he tried to explain his ethos and worldview to the white invaders, saying “the earth and myself are of one mind.”

I firmly believe that our anthropocentric attitude fragments and alienates us not only from the rest of the biota, but also from ourselves. We have lost our natural ‘funkiness’ by selling out to all kinds of artificial ‘virtualities’. In other words, we have lost our natural home in the many flows of our contemporary global times. Allow me to elaborate this argument. I

will use a passage from Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise* in which a clergyman explains what 'real home' is:

Not some fortress you bought and built up and have to keep everybody locked in or out. A real home. Not some place you went to and invaded and slaughtered people to get. Not some place you claimed, snatched because you got the guns. Not some place you stole from the people living there, but your own home, where if you go back past your great-great-grandparents, past theirs, and theirs, past the whole of Western history, past the beginning of organized knowledge, past pyramids and poison bows, on back to when rain was new, before plants forgot they could sing and birds thought they were fish, back when God said Good! Good! — there, right there where you know your own people were born and lived and died. Imagine that [...] place (MORRISON, 1998b: 213).

Here, home is a *concrete utopia* in the Blochian sense imbued with a transcultural vision: a yearning for a yet-to-come cross-cultural relationship whose essence is shot through not with racism, sexism, or any other hierarchical order, but with a collective willingness to accept, respect, and nurture difference as relational diversity of the biota, including human beings. It is a deraced "world-as home" where differences are "prized but unprivileged" (MORRISON, 1998a: 11, 12). As such, it is an example of her transwriting as mediation between cultures, languages, epistemes, and the human and nonhuman worlds; a mediation in which the 'trans' crosses multiculture relating its elements in a continuous process at the crossroads of diverse intercultural contact zones.

If, according to Fernando Ortiz (1947: 102-103), who coined the term 'transculturation' in the 1940s, a two-way transcultural exchange is characterized by

“acculturation,” “deculturation,” and “neoculturation,” then Toni Morrison has not only shown that this exchange, which culminate in the creation of new cultural phenomena, has been a staple of the nation’s cultural make-up. Most importantly, she has problematized that the ‘new’ culture in the United States has never been achieved but is forever in the making. Her novel, *A Mercy*, delineates the nation-space as a transcultural contact zone inhabited by characters who long to belong, but whose homecoming is deferred. Set in the 1680s, the story reveals that throughout the process of colonization the encounter of people from different cultural backgrounds led to what the narrator describes as “the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild” (MORRISON, 2008: 160). Forced transculturation, characterized by diverse forms of domination, resulted in fragmentation and alienation. Europeans, African Americans, and Native Americans were united in their difference through the trauma of geographic and/or spiritual dislocation rooted in the colonizers’ aspiration for property: “cut loose from the earth’s soul, they insisted on purchase of its soil, and like all orphans they were insatiable. It was their destiny to chew up the world and spit out a horribleness that would destroy all primary peoples” (MORRISON, 2008: 54). Thus, Morrison’s *transwriting* makes cogently clear that the diverse forms of violence which brutalized man and space and proliferated in this transcultural contact zone of colonial domination were interrelated and shaped the national ethos and worldview.

What I call *transwriting*, then, is a type of writing as transcultural crossroads characterized by appropriation, revision and mimicry. A writing that interrupts and (re)connects, revealing the ‘trans’ that crosses the ‘multi’ of intercultural relations. The nature of multiculturalism, then, is always *transitory*, on the move; the same goes for multicultural identity. What characterizes multicultural identity is the same that characterizes culture in general: both are not an essence but a continuous production, which is never complete, always in process. Transwriting multicultural elements is nourished by a *mémoire vivante* as social

practice that sediments an apocalyptic history of subalternization and resistance into collective consciousness. It is a type of writing that constitutes, as it creates, an epistemological home as symbolic geography between places, spaces and times. As such it moves through an interstitial space between and within borders, traverses existing territories composed of multiple contact zones, and strives to go beyond, transforming the ambiguity of cultural in-betweenness into an interior consciousness. Times, spaces and identities are fluid, complementary, in process. Western borders of cultural patterns (identity/alterity; exterior/interior) open up into transcultural borderlands where the Western episteme meets and is transculturated by non-Western ones. This means that we are dealing with process, passage, traverse, and transition in an interstitial zone of cultural negotiations where remembrance effects alternative/new visions, structures of authority, and discursive subject positions. An interstitial space, that is, where transcultural mnemonic and imaginary translations establish cultural difference as a process of ongoing interrelation. Morrison and Chamoiseau, among other Pan-American writers, link the brutalization of human beings to the brutalization of space creating a chronotope where a violated-violent sense of time and space dance cheek to cheek. It is this double brutalization that constitutes the political, cultural, and ecological unconscious of the Pan-American experience — the return of the repressed (slavery, the plantation system, indigenous genocide, devastation of nature, etc.) in response to disavowal (*Verleugnung*) —haunting identity and making its presence felt at the level of enunciation and lived experience.

This transcultural crossroads of Pan-American writing with its open-ended, supplementary relations characterized by contradictory complementarity where opacity and revelation, the unforeseen and the planned, history and memory dance to the rhythms of new creations is in my opinion the exact opposite of the transnational reign of the new media and technology as solid pillar of late capitalism that attributes transitory market value to whatever

commodity apt at commercialization. As such a pillar of commodity consumption its objective is to explode mnemonic traces into ever-present short-lived fragments and flashes. Whereas in much of contemporary Pan-American writing words, through memory, recuperate a world of references which contributes to the (re)construction of identity and the comprehension of the heterogeneous make-up of reality within a historical process, the transnational fluxes of digital culture erase origins in a present time that projects the future as its proper repetition. Short-lived mass-market memories imagined within the realm of cyberspace, instead of functioning as identitarian anchors, contribute to the contemporary time-space compression, that is, the increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived space. Since the fluxes of Pan-American writing coexist with what Appadurai has termed the fluxes of mediascapes both these fluxes form a prime example of a contemporary transnational/transcultural crossroads where elements exist in contradictory complementarity. The challenge for critics, then, is to dance on the hyphen that links and separates these elements in order to map the uneven conjunctures and disjunctures of this crossroads.

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