

# SYMPOSIUM

## Redefinitions of Citizenship and Revisions of Cosmopolitanism— Transnational Perspectives

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### Introduction

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The following set of essays consists of revised versions of contributions read at, or prepared for, a roundtable discussion I conceived and organized for the 2009 convention of the American Studies Association in Washington, DC. The short contributions by the individual authors reflect on the boundaries, the perspectives, and the transdisciplinary dynamics of the field imaginary of transnational American Studies and the specific political role of new notions of citizenship and the parameters of a new cosmopolitanism beyond the limits of the Western tradition.

In my introductory essay, I discuss the directions and problems of American Studies after the transnational *and* transcultural turn and the dimensions of a politics of the New American Studies. I suggest that the current debate on the field imaginary should be complemented and rearticulated by a critical engagement with the multidirectional, dialogical, self-critical reflections by political philosophers, political scientists, and anthropologists from different parts of the world on the meanings, problems, and enabling potential of *new* visions of citizenship and of a *radical* cosmopolitanism in a theory of democracy for the globalizing, multipolar, and heterogeneous world today, questioning and transcending the common Euro–North American discursive frame of reference.

Rob Kroes analyzes processes of the “Americanization” of European cultures after 1945 as having helped to create a larger European sense of self and of place by providing Europeans with a shared cultural vernacular and to form a

new public sphere in the European Union in which the tensions, contradictions, but also the potential, of a long post-Kantian *critical* tradition of cosmopolitanism were discussed. Recent debates have dramatically renegotiated the ideas and the interrelations of cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and localism as well as of citizenship in a time of transnationalism and the challenges of something like world citizenship.

If the transnational move of the New American Studies often has pursued the question of how American imperialism and colonizing practices have reverberated in the dynamics of American cultures at home, Rüdiger Kunow traces the export of American-identified cultural practices and their impact on foreign cultures, taking the neglected field of religion, of the transformations effected by the “active cosmopolitanism” of American missionary work on mid-nineteenth-century Pacific islands, as his case study. Kunow reconstructs the politics of the transnational cultural imaginary by focusing on Melville’s early novels *Typee* and *Omoo*, which offer a devastating critique of the destructive consequences of Christian missionary work but are also bound to a romantic evocation of a timeless, prelapsarian state of native cultures. He argues that the contradictions in Melville’s approach are still relevant for analyzing contemporary forms of cosmopolitan practices and for grasping the role of religious cosmopolitanism in the emergent global cultural, social, and political formations.

Alfred Hornung uses Paul Gilroy’s idea of a postcolonial cosmopolitanism characterized by ideas of “conviviality” and “planetary consciousness” (as against the common economic-political ideology of globalism), as well as Gayatri Spivak’s and Ursula Heise’s concepts of planetary citizenship and eco-cosmopolitanism, and applies them to the area of transcultural life writing and ecology. From a global range of intellectuals and writers, he selects the Japanese Canadian scientist David Suzuki who in his two autobiographies relates his evolution from an academic to a public figure. He transferred his teaching and research from the classroom and lab to his popular CBC series *The Nature of Things with David Suzuki*, creating a transcultural network of cooperation on ecological issues beyond national boundaries with indigenous people in the Brazilian rainforest, in Indonesia, and Australia. This idea of a transnational, postcolonial cosmopolitanism rests on his “Declaration of Interdependence” necessary for a planetary consciousness. Such a vision of environmental world citizenship also underlies Barack Obama’s life and life writing; to what extent he can put it into political practice remains to be seen.

Finally, William Boelhower complements Alfred Hornung’s reflections on planetary citizenship by arguing that all the concepts like cosmopolitan democracy, human rights, globalization, world citizenship, or global civil society hinge upon a highly appealing and irrepressible planetary point of view, on the new figure of the *common* as the foundation for any serious discussion in and beyond American Studies. We need to go beyond politics as we know it to our common biopolitical ground, to a sense of the planet as made up of overlapping communities of fate, of political ecology, of the common as foundational for global citizenship and civil society and cosmopolitan democracy. Boelhower

draws on a wide range of political philosophers who have redefined the methodological premises of political and cultural analysis and pursued an open-ended debate on the exercise of agonistic partisanship, collective social practices, and biopolitical struggles about imagining and producing a global commonwealth.

The essays explore a wide range of challenging problems and perspectives of transnational and transcultural studies, but they could not address all the pertinent questions and dimensions. The panel at the ASA convention also included a paper by Deborah Madsen (Université de Genève, Switzerland) on “The States We’re In: Metaphoricity and Transnationality,” which discussed the implications of the construction of transnational spaces like the Black Atlantic, the Pacific Rim, the hemispheric Americas, the Commonwealth, or the EU for democratic citizenship and cosmopolitan democracy, an essay that will be published in a revised form separately.

# Redefinitions of Citizenship and Revisions of Cosmopolitanism— Challenges of Transnational Perspectives

Günter H. Lenz

## The Politics of Transnational and Transcultural American Studies

In recent years, American Studies has increasingly defined its work as transnational and as transcultural. The two terms should not be used interchangeably. It is *transnational* in a double sense: (1) It questions the meaning of “America” (qua USA), decentering the US perspective; it takes views from outside as cofoundational and emphasizes dialogue.<sup>1</sup> (2) It reflects on and deconstructs the focus on the nation-state without simply dismissing its boundaries in its political analyses, and it addresses intracultural and multicultural diversity and hybridity of US culture(s) and transnational interactions and negotiations in a time of globalization and relocalizations. Important work is *transcultural* in a threefold sense: (1) It is characterized by a new self-reflective, processual, and performative understanding of “culture” as always hybrid and transgressive that is not territory-based in the traditional sense. (2) It addresses the inter- and cross-cultural dynamics of cultures, conceived as cultures of difference, exploring the intercultural and diasporic dimensions of every culture and the decentered networks and fields of power relations of cultures as being always in flux, employing analytical strategies like intercultural contact zones, transculturations, or cultural translation. And (3) it reflects on the contemporary meaning and workings of “culture” and “cultural practices” of what used to be defined as the *realm* or *sphere* of culture, relocating cultural studies more explicitly in the changing social and political processes and the power-field of societies in the globalizing world of the new capitalism of new media and new forms and functions of cultural capital; cultural studies has to analyze how culture(s) and cultural processes of/in globalization have changed (John Tomlinson),<sup>2</sup> how the whole realm of “culture” has been restructured and reconfigured (George Yúdice, Imre Szeman),<sup>3</sup> and how far the new economy has produced a “new creative class” (Richard Florida).<sup>4</sup>

For American Studies this means a “centrifugal” dynamics has deconstructed its traditional boundaries, objectives, and methodological procedures, and the sense of its traditional unity as an interdisciplinary field seems to be ever further dispersed. On the other hand, these new challenges also offer chances to rearticulate crucial dimensions and directions of its radically critical and enabling objectives as a civic and engaged project of working out the cultural self-definition and the democratic vision of United States society, of deconstructing and transcending the myth of exceptionalism, and of exploring in a self-reflexive and dialogical manner the *specific* historical interrelations and interactions of multicultural, multiethnic, and intercultural diversity/multiplicity in

US society, responding to the challenges of globalization and a multicentered new global order.

In recent decades powerful versions of a self-critical, self-reflexive, and decentering politics of American Studies have been worked out.<sup>5</sup> European American Studies scholars have, in very different ways, debated the perspectives, directions, and problems of something like “European American Studies.”<sup>6</sup> But these critical reflections should be complemented by, and extended to, a more explicit engagement with the provocative discourses of a wide range of political philosophers, anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists who have explored the contours, dynamics, and potentials of a new theory of democracy in a globalizing, multipolar, and heterogeneous world today.

### **Transnational Political Philosophy: Redefining Citizenship and Belonging**

The politics of transnational and transcultural American Studies asks, first of all, for a critical debate with the impressive efforts of redefining and refashioning the dimensions and the social, political, and cultural repercussions of the concept of *citizenship* that reconceive and resituate “culture” in today’s multiplicitous societies and politics. Citizenship as a concept has become deeply self-different and has lost its traditional all-comprising claims of a public identity that “subordinates and coordinates all other identities—of religion, estate, family, gender, ethnicity, region, and the like” and its basis in a closed concept of national territory and unified national culture that was seen as providing an abiding sense of belonging.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the discussion on multiple, complementary, as well as competing, dimensions and references of “citizenship” also asks for a comparative, intercultural approach that addresses the different, often heterogeneous experiences and political, social, and philosophical discourses in various parts of the world in specific situated case studies, both in their theoretical exposition and their practical implementation. Engaging the theoretical debate on the rearticulations of future meanings of citizenship offers the opportunity of exploring the specific interactive dynamics of the *philosophical* redefinitions of the various dimensions of *human rights* and their *legal, institutional, and political embeddedness* in transnationally constituted social networks. Political philosophers and historians have, in a transatlantic and cross-cultural perspective, theorized the different questions of citizenship in terms of civil, political, and social rights and extended the debate to the specific demands of cultural rights (of difference). As the British sociologist John Urry argues, new dimensions of “citizenship rights” have developed in recent decades: cultural citizenship, minority rights, the right of ecological citizenship, cosmopolitan citizenship, and mobility citizenship, all of them transnational and deterritorialized rights that together produce a highly contested and often contradictory mixture in a globalizing world.<sup>8</sup>

Important contributions are, for example, Linda Kerber on the “braided” history of discrimination in terms of gender, race, and class in the practices of national and social citizenship in the United States and the contemporary

challenges of “transnational” or “postnational citizenship”; Will Kymlicka on the supplementary relations of different kinds of minority rights and of human rights and the repercussions of their difficult, often ambiguous institutional implementations of something like “multicultural citizenship”; William Rogers Brubaker’s comparative reflections on immigration, global migrations, and the conflicting dimensions of a politics of citizenship and social membership in Europe and North America; and Rainer Bauböck’s reflections on “transnational citizenship,” on membership and rights in international migrations.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, moving beyond the scope of European and North American citizenship discourses, Malaysian-born, “overseas Chinese,” and Chinese American anthropologist Aihwa Ong (University of California, Berkeley) powerfully approaches the questions of *flexible citizenship* and the *cultural logics of transnationality* from the experiences of displaced, diasporan Chinese, Asian Americans, and mainland Chinese in the context of “alternative,” “multiple,” “non-Western modernities” and the unique economic, political, social, and cultural developments under the new specific engagement of the Chinese Republic with global capitalism.<sup>10</sup> Ong revises unidirectional Western accounts of globalization and of postcolonialism, reasserts the agency of non-Western, so-called (de-)colonized subjects (and their production of transnational spaces), and rearticulates the complexities of the very concept of *citizenship* (and governmentality) in a complex and highly charged force-field of multiple and decentering processes of a transnational flexible capitalism: “‘Flexible citizenship’ refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (6; cf. 112, where she focuses more explicitly on “mobile managers, technicians, and professionals”).

In Europe, in the context of the processes of forging a comprehensive European community out of historically competing independent nation-states, the very different traditional notions of citizenship and the legal and practical institutionalization of various rights, including the controversial (and limited) notions of dual citizenship, have been hotly debated in a comparative analysis of historical and current developments in the US. Etienne Balibar has posed the question, Is European citizenship possible? and, from a comparative American Studies perspective, Rob Kroes pursues the problems of how the contested, conflicted social forces of cultural affinities and political affiliations make up a sense of citizenship that still is a matter of membership and belonging but that transcends the communal bounds and bonds of individual, often territorially defined, communities.<sup>11</sup> How does a comparative study of the different debates on the future of citizenship in the US and in the European Union open up visions of the transnational dimensions of citizenship in the emerging networks of global communication?

The analysis of visions and versions of dual, multiple, transnational, or flexible citizenship can give Americans a new understanding of the specifics of their politics, society, and cultures and the global dynamics they are part of. To Europeans, the comparative view of the United States can clarify a new sense of

transnational cultural and political citizenship that actively responds to the contemporary developments of global migrations, global communication, and a reconstitution of the spheres of culture and politics. The decentering and deconstructing forces of the transnational conceptions and practices of citizenship threaten the traditional sense of home, of belonging, of community, but they also open up new options for forging more complex, multifaceted, and more experimental and localized visions of communal political and cultural practices in the globalizing world. As the late political philosopher Iris Marion Young argued in her essay “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship” (1989), “instead of a universal citizenship in the sense of this generality [i.e., the creation of a unified public realm in which citizens leave behind their particular group affiliations, histories, and needs to discuss a general interest or common good], we need a group-differentiated citizenship and a heterogeneous public.”<sup>12</sup> In this heterogeneous public, differences among people are recognized and acknowledged as irreducible, but, Young continues, “commitment to the need and desire to decide together the society’s policies fosters communication across those differences” (271).

### **Transatlantic and Transnational Political Philosophy: Redefinitions of Cosmopolitanism**

If the dispersal of a unifying meaning of citizenship seems to have produced a sense of centrifugal force in terms of community and cultural identity, the rich recent debate on the meaning and the promises of new versions of *cosmopolitanism* can be taken as a wider frame in which the discourses on new forms of citizenship can be rearticulated in an enabling, self-reflexive, multicentered view of home, belonging, culture, society, governance, and justice in the world today.

Cosmopolitanism has been criticized by some (e.g., Timothy Brennan, David Harvey, Chantal Mouffe) as a bohemian, Eurocentric, bourgeois, and elitist notion that, in the end, is supportive of globalist capitalism and has to be rejected.<sup>13</sup> In spite of this often reductionist and highly polemical stance, their critique of the cosmopolitan project is important, as it challenges the meaning of the political in cosmopolitan thought and, particularly in Chantal Mouffe’s *On the Political* (2005), explores the need for an *agonistic* approach that acknowledges the *plurality* of hegemonic powers in world politics. But Mouffe reads them not as simply *antagonistic* powers that have to be forced into a consensus or that try to destroy one another, but as having to create a “vibrant ‘agonistic’ public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted,” a public sphere that accepts that there is “no rational solution to their conflict” but “nevertheless recognizes the legitimacy of their opponents” (3, 20, 52). This means, I think, that a *dialogical approach* and a new critical engagement with competing “partial,” “discrepant” versions of a new cosmopolitanism, articulated from different parts of the world, are pertinent. There cannot be *one single true* version of cosmopolitanism today, but the questions of justice, governance,

citizenship, human rights, or cultural differences have to be debated and negotiated in different transnational and transcultural contexts in an open and agonistic public discourse in a multicentered world. As Pheng Cheah writes at the end of his contribution to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1992), coedited with Bruce Robbins, “nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and the cosmopolitical are formed from the complicated intertwinings of culture, politics, and economics, and . . . we can conceptualize these phenomena adequately only by working in the volatile zone where ethical philosophy, political theory, cultural anthropology, social theory, critical theory, and cultural studies interact.”<sup>14</sup>

There are powerful and competing versions of a new critical cosmopolitanism in a globalizing, postcolonial, multicentered world that have been theorized and debated by social and political philosophers and anthropologists on both sides of the Atlantic and from other parts of the world. In Europe, German sociologist Ulrich Beck has suggestively analyzed since his 1998 “Cosmopolitan Manifesto” the problems and options of a “cosmopolitan democracy,” of a “post-national cosmopolitan world-order” and “expanding ‘world citizenship,’” as well as the strategies of a “reflexive methodological cosmopolitanism” of a “‘deterritorialized’ concept of cosmopolitanism,” and has elaborated the specific perspectives of a “cosmopolitan Europe.”<sup>15</sup> From a very different background, the black British cultural and social critic Paul Gilroy, in his book *Postcolonial Melancholia* (2005), proposes a new “vernacular,” “demotic” postcolonial cosmopolitanism that is characterized by the “radically open” ideas of “conviviality” and “planetary consciousness,” a notion also suggestively theorized by Gayatri Spivak in her *Death of a Discipline* (2003).<sup>16</sup> In the United States, historians such as David Hollinger and political philosophers like Seyla Benhabib, Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser, and Kwame Anthony Appiah have cogently explored a theory of “deliberative” and “communicative” democracy in a “globalized world of uncertainty, hybridity, fluidity, and contestation.”<sup>17</sup> They have analyzed, also from a feminist perspective, the transformations of the meanings and roles of flexible, nonterritorial, and world citizenship, of diaspora, of justice and governance, of the distinction of state and nation. They offer versions of a rooted, partial (in a double sense), or federal cosmopolitanism that have suggestively grown out of a critical transatlantic dialogue. What is crucially important, however, is that they also transcend the boundaries of a (self-critical, self-reflexive) Western notion of cosmopolitanism by engaging in a reconstructive, dialogic rearticulation of a wide range of non-Western cosmopolitan discourses.

These non-Euro-American versions of cosmopolitanism are articulated in Appiah’s engagement with West African (Ghanaian) philosophical traditions, in Amitav Ghosh’s Asian postcolonial cosmopolitanism, and in the various case studies of several contributors on indigenous, native discourses of postcolonial cosmopolitanisms situated and energized in the “demotic worlds of transethnic and transnational interaction and communication, a world populated by non-elite, working-class cosmopolitans,” collected in the conference volume *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives*,

edited by Prina Werbner in 2008.<sup>18</sup> The most radical and demanding program of a decentering cosmopolitanism that explores the relationship between globalization, capitalism, modernity, and colonialism has been worked out by Walter D. Mignolo, an Argentinian scholar teaching in the US. His program, elaborated in his essay “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism” (2000), conceived from a Latin American perspective, of a dialogical, diversified postcolonial cosmopolitanism based on border thinking or border epistemology “issu[es] forth from the *colonial difference*.”<sup>19</sup> His *critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism*, “emerging from the various spatial and historical locations of the colonial difference,” leads toward epistemic “diversality” that demands a “different conceptualization of human rights and democracy, and, of course, of citizenship” (741, 743, 744).

These different versions of a new cosmopolitanism have explored ways of a transnational and transcultural understanding and cooperation that move beyond the demands of a total agreement on *universal* norms and envision, instead, cultural, social, and political practices that work *dialogically* with partial, provisional, and localizing parameters in a pragmatic, or pragmatist, way (with full awareness of the challenges the notion of “dialogue” has to meet in its practical transcultural implementation). All of them have offered penetrating analyses of the tensions and contradictions but also the productive, energizing potential of newly defined conceptions and practices of governance, justice, citizenship, and the role of social and cultural differences in new theories of democracies in a multipolar world of unequal distribution of power and resources. They are aware of the ambivalent political position of the United States, but they also pursue the productive ways the dynamics of multicultural American society can be transculturated in other parts of the world, a productive ambivalence of the discourses of citizenship and cosmopolitanism that should be taken up by American Studies scholars on both sides of the Atlantic.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “What Is the International Initiative?” American Studies Association, [http://www.theasa.net/project\\_international\\_initiative/page/what\\_is\\_the\\_international\\_initiative/](http://www.theasa.net/project_international_initiative/page/what_is_the_international_initiative/); and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Culture: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57.

<sup>2</sup> See John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See Imre Szeman, “Culture and Globalization, or, The Humanities in Ruins,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 91–115; Imre Szeman, “Cultural Studies and the Transnational,” in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. Gary Hall and Claire Birchall (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 200–18; and George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> See Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> See the New Americanists; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1996); Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London: Verso, 2004); Giles Gunn and Carl Gutiérrez-Jones, eds., *America and the Misshaping of a New World Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), available online through eScholarship at the California Digital Library, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1tf697pk>; Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Amy Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, October 17, 2003," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2004): 1–18; Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993); Paul Lauter, *A Companion to American Literature and Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Paul Lauter, *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park: Activism, Culture, & American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Donald E. Pease, "Re-thinking 'American Studies after US Exceptionalism,'" *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 19–27; Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *The Futures of American Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Joel Pfister, "The Americanization of Cultural Studies," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 4, no. 2 (1991): 199–229; Joel Pfister, *Critique for What? Cultural Studies, American Studies, Left Studies* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2006); John Carlos Rowe, ed., *A Concise Companion to American Studies* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); John Carlos Rowe, *The New American Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and John Carlos Rowe, ed., *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> See Mita Banerjee, "Cultural Studies and Americanization," *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* 54, no. 3 (2009): 499–521; Mita Banerjee, ed., *Virtually American? Denationalizing North American Studies* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009); Marc Chénétier, "'New' 'American Studies': Exceptionalism Redux?" *European Journal of American Studies* 2 (2008), <http://ejas.revues.org/7453>; Winfried Fluck, "American Literary History and the Romance with America," *American Literary History* 21, no. 1 (2009): 1–18; Winfried Fluck, *Romance with America? Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies*, ed. Laura Bieger and Johannes Voelz (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009); Paul Giles, "European American Studies and American American Studies," *European Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 1 (1999): 12–16; Paul Giles, "Virtual Americas: The Internationalization of American Studies and the Ideology of Exchange," *American Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1998): 523–47; Alfred Hornung, "European Perspectives of American Studies," in Banerjee, *Virtually American?* 55–65; Heinz Ickstadt, "American Studies as Area Studies as Transnational Studies? A European Perspective," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 3 (2007): 633–40; Liam Kennedy, "American Studies Without Tears, or What Does America Want?" *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1

(2009), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/27v4s1sc>; Rüdiger Kunow, "People of the Crossing: The Subcontinental Diaspora in the United States," in *Transgressions: Cultural Interventions in the Global Manifold*, ed. Renate Brosch and Rüdiger Kunow (Trier: Wiss. Verlag Trier, 2005), 39–57; Günter H. Lenz, "Radical Cosmopolitanism: W. E. B. Du Bois, Germany, and African American Pragmatist Visions for Twentieth-First Century Europe," in *Representation and Decoration in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Alfred Hornung and Rüdiger Kunow (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009), 65–96; Günter H. Lenz, "Toward a Dialogics of International American Culture Studies: Transnationality, Border Discourses, and Public Culture(s)," in Pease and Wiegman, *Futures of American Studies*, 461–85, first published in *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 44, no. 1 (1999): 5–23; Günter H. Lenz, "Transnational American Studies: Negotiating Cultures of Difference, Multicultural Identities, and Border Discourses," in *Multiculturalism in Transit: A German-American Exchange*, ed. Klaus J. Milich and Jeffrey M. Peck (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 129–66; and Deborah L. Madsen, "Un-American Exceptionalism in the Disciplinary Field: From Unmeltable Ethnics to Flexible Citizens," in *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*, ed. Janet Wilson, Cristina Şandru, and Sarah Lawson Welsh (New York: Routledge, 2010), 206–17.

<sup>7</sup> James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Cities and Citizenship," in *Cities and Citizenship*, ed. James Holston (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>8</sup> See John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> See Linda K. Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *Journal of American History* 84, no. 3 (1997): 833–54; Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Rogers Brubaker, "Immigration, Citizenship, and the Nation-State in France and Germany," in *The Citizenship Debates: A Reader*, ed. Gershon Shafir (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 131–63; and Rainer Bauböck, *Transnational Citizenship: Membership and Rights in International Migration* (Aldershot, UK: Edward Elgar, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> See Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> See Etienne Balibar, "Is European Citizenship Possible?" *Public Culture* 8, no. 2 (1996): 355–76; and Rob Kroes, *Them and Us: Questions of Citizenship in a Globalizing World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," in Shafir, *Citizenship Debates*, 271.

<sup>13</sup> See Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Timothy Brennan, "Cosmo-Theory," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 3 (2001): 659–91; Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); and Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Pheng Cheah, "Introduction Part II: The Cosmopolitical—Today," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 38.

<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, *Das kosmopolitische Europa* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), translated into English as *Cosmopolitan Europe*, trans. Claran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). See also Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, nos. 1–2 (2002): 17–44; and Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 186. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kwame Anthony Appiah, Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, and Iris Marion Young, *Justice, Governance, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Difference*, Distinguished W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures 2004/2005, ed. and intro. Günter H. Lenz and Antje Dallmann (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 2007); Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, The Berkeley Tanner Lectures, with Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig, and Will Kymlicka, ed. Robert Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Seyla Benhabib, *The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Nancy Fraser, *Adding Insult to Injury: Nancy Fraser Debates Her Critics*, ed. Kevin Olson (London: Verso, 2008); Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); David A. Hollinger, "Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the United States," in *Immigration and Citizenship in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Noah M. J. Pickus (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 85–99; David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Pnina Werbner, "The Cosmopolitan Encounter: Social Anthropology and the Kindness of Strangers," in *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives*, ed. Pnina Werbner (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmopolis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 13, no. 3 (2000): 724, emphasis added.

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## Citizenship in a Trans-Atlantic Perspective

Rob Kroes

The United States, throughout what is commonly referred to as the “American Century,” has held cultural sway over those living within its imperial reach, particularly in the years following World War II. Among Europeans at the receiving end of its cultural radiance there has been a blend of intrigued fascination mixed in with cultural resistance, trying to make sense of America’s cultural Otherness as measured by European standards, and to fathom the impact of American mass culture on Europe’s cultural landscape. In fact the history of these European concerns predates the “American Century.” Words like Americanization were coined in Europe as early as the nineteenth century when America was still in the early stages of developing forms of mass culture to Americanize the many who had come as strangers to its shores. In the process Americans managed to develop a cultural vernacular that could speak to mass audiences rather than elite publics. And it did so with all the mastery it used in reaching mass markets for its mass-produced consumption commodities. In fact it never shrank from applying the logic of marketing to cultural forms. From its early origins, it might be argued, American mass culture was both democratic *and* commercial, conceiving of its public as cultural consumers constituting a market. And it appealed to that market with all the force of its advertising wizardry, wrapping its products, whether economic commodities like cigarettes or cultural products like film, in seductive narrative fantasies that were all equally evocative of an imaginary America, a dreamscape that had Americanized the immigrants before it would tempt foreign publics.<sup>1</sup>

The history of the European encounter with an American culture cast in this mold is one of European audiences, mostly the younger generations, appropriating these seductive dreams and making them their own, against parental strictures. Thus, particularly in the post-World War II years, when Europe had set out on its own course toward a culture of consumption, in many cases America provided them with the standards for emulation, providing each next generation of youngsters with a cultural vernacular redolent with American fantasies. In these younger generations’ quest for a cultural identity American ingredients served as alternatives in cultural struggles waged in every European national setting with cultural gatekeepers guarding the purity of the national identity. Thus a shared cultural vernacular could evolve that is meaningfully summarized in the quip that the only culture that Europeans have in common across national borders is American culture.

In this view we may conceive of this new cultural vernacular in terms of cosmopolitan memory. Replete as this cultural vernacular—or vernacular culture, for that matter—is with imagined Americas, it does put one in mind of David Levy and Natan Sznajder’s view of cosmopolitan memory as independent of specific carrier groups, but rather as being mediated by films, television, the music

industry, books, photographs, all being available for mass consumption. As they put it, “cosmopolitan memory thus implies some recognition of the history (and memories) of the Other,” the Other in our case being an imagined, if not imaginary, America.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I will argue that European experiences and cultural habits are imbricated with patterns of American mass culture, particularly in the post–World War II era. America, in our case, is that “Other” whose history and memories, as refracted in America’s own mass cultural productions, are being increasingly acknowledged in European forms of cultural appropriation and resistance. To make my case, I’ll be looking at the many ways in which American cultural transmissions, as so many semantic bits and pieces, have been filling Europe’s public space. In other words, I’ll be looking at the American “signage” that has increasingly come to constitute the semantic environment of daily life in Europe.

### **Europe’s Inner Contradictions: Nationalism vs. Cosmopolitanism**

In current reflections on the ways in which Europe is changing if not evolving, two pairs of buzzwords emphasize the contradictory forces affecting Europe’s changes. One pair, cosmopolitanism and transnationalism, focuses our attention on the many ways in which the political affiliations and cultural affinities of Europeans have transcended their conventional frames of reference, away from the nation and the nation-state. The other pair, nationalism and localism, stresses the enduring power of precisely such conventional forms of affiliation and self-identification. At the present point in time, with Europe engaged in the Promethean venture of introducing a Constitution-like framework for the European Union following its last dramatic expansion of scale, hidebound forms of nationalism and localism are gaining strength. Public opinion in the member states of the Union is increasingly skeptical of the whole project, seeing it as a cultural and economic threat rather than as a promise of a better life for all involved. This may be temporary and transient, a moment’s hesitation in the face of a daring leap into a future whose costs may outweigh its benefits. The current economic malaise in much of Europe may in fact lead many ruefully to look back at the days of national sovereignty and the sense of collective control of the national destiny that is now a nostalgic memory. There is a feeling of loss of direction, which in many member states takes people to a renewed reflection on national identity and national culture. Even in a country like the Netherlands where Dutchness has most of the time been more of a “given”—to use Daniel Boorstin’s word to describe the consensual nature of America’s political culture—and therefore hardly ever openly contested or argued, it has recently become a hotly debated issue in political and intellectual circles.<sup>3</sup> The causes of this recent trend are as much domestic, having to do with the increased multicultural nature of Dutch society, as they are European, if not global. Yet in the eyes of many the two are interrelated; the increased porosity of national borders is seen as due to the superimposition of a “Europe without borders.”

This hidebound view of what is wrong with Europe stands in opposition to views of European developments in the light of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. German sociologist Ulrich Beck is among those who see transnationalism as the outcome of long-term processes ushering in a stage of Second Modernity; they are processes that have worked to erode the logic of the historical stage of First Modernity, centered on the bonding and bounding force of nationalism in the historical formation of the nation-state.<sup>4</sup> Nationalism as a historical project aimed at molding nations conceived in terms of cultural and political homogeneity, speaking one national language, sharing one cultural identity. Its logic was inherently binary. At the same time as defining insiders, it defined outsiders. These could be strangers in the midst of the “imagined community” of the nation, a living contradiction to the ideal-typical construction of the “pure” nation, and therefore subject to a range of forms of exclusion, if not persecution, or they could literally be outsiders, members of other nations, and therefore cultural, almost legitimate, “others.”<sup>5</sup> In our age of globalization this binary logic has been relentlessly eroded. Exposed to a worldwide flow of cultural expression, people everywhere have appropriated cultural codes alien to their homogenized national cultures. They have developed multiple identities, allowing them to move across a range of cultural affinities and affiliations. The communications revolution, most recently in the form of the World Wide Web, has made for a freedom of movement between a multitude of self-styled communities of taste and opinion, transcending national borders. A person’s national identity is now only one among many options for meaningful affiliation with fellow human beings, triggered at some moments while remaining dormant, or latent, at others. One’s local roots are now only one of the many signifiers of a person’s sense of self. Beck calls this rooted cosmopolitanism. There is no cosmopolitanism without localism.<sup>6</sup>

As Beck also points out, much of this new cosmopolitanism is relatively unreflected, “banal” (21). Teenagers affiliating with a transnational youth culture, sharing cultural appetites with untold others dispersed across the globe, are simply consumers of mass culture, unaware of the existential joy of their transnational venture. Banal nationalism is being constantly eroded by the torrent of banal cosmopolitanism in the forms of mass culture that wash across the globe. It is banal *because* it is unreflected, never leading the new cosmopolitans to pause and ponder what happened to their sense of self. Yet, unaware as they may be of the intricate pattern of cultural vectors that guide their cultural consumption, collectively they have worked to cosmopolitanize the nation-state from within. Countries like France, Germany, Britain, or the Netherlands are no longer nation-states but transnational states. Mass culture of course is only one of the forces of change. International migration, the formation of diasporic communities across the map of Europe, and the attendant rise of multiculturalism have also changed the conventional paradigm of the nation-state. There is nothing banal here, in the sense of an unreflected cosmopolitanism taking root. Quite the contrary; the anguished consideration of the changed contours of nationhood and the citizenry is a clear reflection of the concern, shared by many,

about what has happened to the idea of the nation. Yet, as Beck argues in *Dissent*, the only way for the European project to go forward is for Europe to become a transnational state, a more defined and complex variant of what its component nations are already becoming.

Much as I agree with this vision of Europe's future, I am struck by the historical myopia in Beck's argument. As he presents his case, Europe's Second Modernity, its age of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, evolves from Europe's First Modernity, an age whose central logic was that of the nation-state. This seems to deny the long historical experience of cosmopolitanism in Europe, of a view of the civilized life centering on what can only be described as European culture. No banal cosmopolitanism here, but the high-minded version of cultural elites producing and consuming a culture that was truly cosmopolitan, transcending the borders and bounds of the nation-state. It was always a rooted cosmopolitanism, with European trends and styles in the arts always being refracted through local appropriations, reflecting local tastes and manners. As Kant defined cosmopolitanism, it was always a way of combining the universal and the particular, *Nation und Weltbürger*, nation and world citizenship. This is the lasting and exhilarating promise of European history, in spite of the atrocities committed on European soil in the name of the homogenized nation, marching in lockstep, purging itself of unwanted "others." The vision of world citizenship, the transcending idea of humanity, has always had to be defended against the other half of Kant's dialectical pair, against the claims on behalf of the nation. In an astute discussion of the Nuremberg tribunal and the new legal principle of "crimes against humanity" that it introduced, Beck makes the following observation, worth quoting in full:

It is at this point that cosmopolitan Europe generates a genuinely European inner contradiction, legally, morally, and politically. The traditions from which colonial, nationalist, and genocidal horror originated were clearly European. But so were the new legal standards against which these acts were condemned and tried in the spotlight of world publicity. At this formative moment in its history, Europe mobilized its traditions to produce something historically new. It took the idea of recognition of the humanity of the Other and made it the foundation of an historically new counter-logic. It specifically designed this logic to counteract the ethnic perversion of the European tradition to which the nation-based form of European modernity had just shown itself so horribly liable. It was an attempt to distill a European antidote to Europe.<sup>7</sup>

This is truly what the post-World War II project of building a new Europe has been all about, to draw on a long European tradition of high-minded cosmopolitanism,

inclusive of cultural variety and cultural Others, and internalized by its citizens as a plurality of individual selves.

This is a daunting project. If it succeeds it may well serve as a model to the world, a rival to the American ideal of transnationalism, of constituting a nation of nations. I remind the reader of high-minded calls made at the time of World War I by a young generation of intellectuals, such as Waldo Frank and Randolph Bourne, who brilliantly and paradoxically sought to translate their cultural nationalism into a quest for American transnationalism, inspired by the heterogeneous immigrant multitudes who composed the nation. Yet, if the European way into the future and the American way are rival models, they are at the same time of one kind. They are variations on larger ideals inspiring the idea of Western civilization and find their roots in truly European formative moments in history, in the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. Larry Siedentop places the formative moment even earlier in time, coinciding with the rise of a Christian view of the universal equality of mankind vis-à-vis God. As he presents it, the formative moment consisted in universalizing a religious view that in Judaism was still highly particularist, claiming an exceptionalist relation between God and the people of Israel.<sup>8</sup> This shared heritage inspired the first trans-Atlantic readings of what the terrorist attack of 9/11 signified. It was seen as an onslaught on the core values of a shared civilization. How ironic, if not tragic, then, that before long the United States and Europe parted ways in finding the proper response to the new threat of international terrorism.

As for the United States, under its then-President George W. Bush, the first signs of a farewell to internationalism in foreign policy—to its Wilsonianism, if you wish—and to its pioneering role in designing the institutional and legal framework for peaceful interstate relations in the world, had actually preceded 9/11. No longer did the Bush administration conceive of the United States as a *primus inter pares*, setting the guidelines for collective action while seeking legitimacy for action through treaties and United Nations resolutions. As the one hegemon on the world stage it apparently felt free from constraints set by its own Constitution or by international law in the pursuit of its national interest through policies that one can only describe as unilateralist. Such a pursuit by the Bush administration may appear like a throwback to the time of nation-state sovereignty, a stage in history that Europe is struggling to transcend.

The tragedy in these recent trends is all the more poignant for those who gratefully remember America's relatively disinterested role, following World War II, in the creation of a larger, self-conscious European entity, if not identity. This entity, as the United States envisioned and sponsored it, was to be economic, political, and cultural.<sup>9</sup> As for the latter aspect, United States public diplomacy actively worked to disseminate its culture abroad, from its highbrow to lowbrow varieties. In addition, though, under its own commercial steam, American mass culture successfully conquered foreign markets and formed cultural tastes and appetites abroad, Americanizing its publics in the process. Ironically, in this way as well, America worked to create a larger European sense of self and of place, by providing Europeans with a shared cultural vernacular.

Two final points for consideration:

1. If a shared cultural vernacular across Europe's cultural space consists partly of American mass cultural productions as consumed in Europe, how can we understand that to translate into a meaningful sense of European affinities? Perhaps the translation proceeds dialectically through acts of cultural resistance where an internalized America is again externalized as a symbol of globalization. There are many examples of this happening. A sense of Europeanization is then the result of the act of "Othering," if not exorcising, the "America" in us, i.e., us Europeans.
2. If America, in addition to providing Europeans with a model for cultural tastes and affinities in the post-World War II era, has managed to set itself up as a political model as well, are there similar dialectical processes at work? May we, for instance, see signs of this happening in the European political ferment during the run-up to the Iraq War? I remind the reader of Jürgen Habermas's widely publicized opinion that Europe could only come to a sense of its collective political identity through resisting America's overbearing power.<sup>10</sup> In the widespread antiwar protest across Europe, Habermas saw signs of a European public opinion forming. His was a public position reminiscent of Randolph Bourne's just prior to America's intervention in World War I on the side of Britain. Bourne argued that continued nonintervention would allow America finally to cut the umbilical cord that tied it to Britain's cultural and political dominion.<sup>11</sup> Or do things work differently, and is there a submerged longing in Europe for an America returning to its inspirational role, as evidenced by the signs of mass affiliation with what Obama appeared to represent during his swing through Europe as a presidential candidate? The high point was the mass rally in Berlin on July 24, 2008, reminiscent of the public enthusiasm aroused by John F. Kennedy's June 1963 visit to the city. Can we see in this the longing for American inspirational leadership, and a sign of Europe falling far short of showing such power of promise and political affiliation?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the early history of the formation of American mass culture, I refer the reader to Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, eds. *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 103.

<sup>3</sup> See Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953, especially chapter I.

<sup>4</sup> See Ulrich Beck, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Emerging from a Rivalry of Distinctions,” in *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, ed. Ulrich Beck, Natan Sznaider, and Rainer Winter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 15–29; and also Ulrich Beck, “Understanding the Real Europe,” *Dissent*, Summer 2003, available online at <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=483>.

<sup>5</sup> On these processes of exclusion and inclusion, as they relate to historical dramas of ethnic and cultural cleansing, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Beck, “Rooted Cosmopolitanism,” 17.

<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Beck, “Understanding the Real Europe: A Cosmopolitan Perspective” (annual Neale Wheeler Watson Lecture, Nobel Museum, Stockholm, Sweden, June 1, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Larry Siedentop, *Democracy in Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 190, 195, 198.

<sup>9</sup> See Geir Lundestad, “Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952,” *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986): 263–77.

<sup>10</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, “Interview with Jürgen Habermas,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 18, 2004, 15; and also Jürgen Habermas, *Der gespaltene Westen* [The Divided West] (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 34.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph Bourne, “American Independence and the War,” *The Seven Arts*, supplement to the April issue, May 16, 1917.

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# Melville, Religious Cosmopolitanism, and the New American Studies

Rüdiger Kunow

I. The programmatic move in the New American Studies from national to transnational research frames has given conceptual priority to differential cultural identifications and allegiances, especially those coming in from outside the territorial boundaries of the United States. Such a move complicates in a useful way the disciplinary understanding of “America,” as it gives the lie to “the monolingual and monocultural myth . . . that is both a political and an intellectual anachronism.”<sup>1</sup> All the while, as some observers have noted, the New American Studies, for all its transnational and transcultural aspirations, have often “remain[ed] vestigially inscribed by the ideology of American exceptionalism,” especially in continuing to view practices of cultural transnationalism primarily from what I would like to call an importationist perspective, with an overriding interest in what these practices contribute to the make-up of US culture.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper I will be looking in the opposite direction, tracing the export of American-identified cultural practices and the impact of this export in the extramural space outside the boundaries of the US nation-state. I will do this in a field much neglected so far by the New American Studies, religion, a domain which has itself a long history of assisting and justifying, even celebrating, the expansion of US presence, political, social, cultural, to other parts of the globe.<sup>3</sup> More exactly, I will discuss religion in a historical setting vastly different from the contemporary contexts in which the New American Studies usually operates, namely the mid-nineteenth-century Pacific islands.

The spaces “of unfathomable mobility” that were in the course of the nineteenth century opened up in various regions of the “South Seas” by trade, colonization, or religious proselytizing soon became spaces also of a seemingly unfathomable cultural mobility.<sup>4</sup> Inside these spaces, a steadily growing number of American citizens, “long-distance specialists” such as sailors, traders, missionaries, began to operate and bring with them American cultural practices and convictions.<sup>5</sup> While we know precious little about the impact of these cultural exports on the indigenous populations in their own voices, the American exporters were for the most part articulate people. In their writings, among them travelogues, ethnographic and missionary reports, they registered their interactions with a culture that was as “Other” to their Euro-American tastes as was possible at that time. Regardless of how these actors inscribed the intercultural contacts that they had initiated, their texts established an early form of a transnational cultural imaginary; they became the principle conduits through which their fellow countrymen and women attained knowledge about a part of the globe that was soon to captivate the dread and desire of Euro-Americans and in so doing generated a specific variant of Orientalism in which the Pacific figured “as a vast basin of soft, lotus-warm civilization.”<sup>6</sup> In these various ways, the

Pacific as a “contact zone” became one vast laboratory of nineteenth-century US cultural transnationalism.<sup>7</sup>

Within the format of a short paper like this, I cannot hope to do justice to the whole panoply of transnational and intercultural contacts as they unfolded on the Pacific islands. As mentioned above, I will restrict my focus to the field of religion. Such a choice justifies itself because religions, as Samuel Huntington, among others, observed, have often “provid[ed] a basis for identity and commitment that transcends national boundaries and unites civilizations”<sup>8</sup>; they have created and sustained their own particular brand of cosmopolitanism, one that inserts insider/outsider relations into a framework that is at the same time transnational and transcendental.

If we further take as a common descriptor of cosmopolitanism a “mass-based feeling of belonging to a world-wide community,” then religions have time and again inspired and fueled such feelings.<sup>9</sup> In fact, of the great monotheistic religions, especially Christianity and Islam have been imbued by a global spiritual consciousness and the intention of creating an ideal world community of the faithful. On the basis of such an “activist cosmopolitanism” (37), they have from very early on in their history “mobilized” as it were their faith, reaching out in a sustained and systematic fashion beyond the confines of the respective social and cultural home terrain through a “model of cross-cultural communication.”<sup>10</sup>

This model is enacted by a particular practice of cross-cultural outreach for which the term “mission” has established itself. In the Christian context, the term, while not possessing Biblical origin, clearly claims divine authority through Jesus’s act of sending out his disciples to “teach all nations” (Matt. 28:18). This act, called by theologians the “Great Commission,” has been taken up over the centuries by missionaries who took their faith to all parts of the globe. If it can be said of any cultural practice that it always and consistently operates at the “fault lines of cultural difference,” then it is true of missionary work, in which notions of the transcendental get translocated, unmoored from their social and cultural context of origin and translated into a different context.<sup>11</sup> In historical perspective, mission presents itself as an exemplar of cultural diffusion, adaptation, interaction, a particularly effective, Western, way of managing cultural difference. Timothy Brennan has noted about some brands of cosmopolitanism that they involve “a hardening of positions,” a forceful joining together of what is separate.<sup>12</sup> Much missionary work would fit this description; it works by disciplining the cultural Other, spiritually and also culturally, inducting its converts into a wholly different way of life. As one of the most notorious nineteenth-century US missionaries, Hiram Bingham, put it, “The object for which the missionaries felt themselves impelled to visit the Hawaiian [*sic*] race, was to honor God, by making known his will, and to benefit those heathen tribes . . . , to introduce and extend among them the more useful arts and usages of civilized and Christianized society,” a society that should resemble as closely as possible the American way of life that the missionaries had left behind.<sup>13</sup>

Bingham’s field of operation, the Hawai’ian archipelago, as well as other Pacific island communities, became in the course of the nineteenth century a chief

target area for American missionary activities. In 1834, William Alexander began with a short-lived project to missionize the people on the Marquesas Islands, with the intention of spreading both American religion and American culture: “They [Alexander’s group of missionaries] came to the Marquesas as self-conscious emissaries of light and order, intending nothing less than the transformation of Marquesan culture.”<sup>14</sup> Unlike Hiram Bingham’s mission on the Hawai’ian islands, however, the Marquesan project soon faltered, for lack of support by the indigenous elite and insufficient funds. Alexander’s short-lived and ultimately fruitless efforts furthermore remind us that missions were not isolated acts of personal daring on the part of the individuals involved, but they depended on an emerging transnational organizational infrastructure. To provide such a structure was the explicit aim of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the first American foreign mission agency, founded in 1812 with the goal to “communicate the Gospel of salvation to the poor heathen.”<sup>15</sup> Developing in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening, the ABCFM made US missions in the Pacific possible by soliciting contributions from congregations and private donors without which the missionaries could not have done their work. At the same time, the ABCFM set standards for this work as it monitored as closely as was possible at that time the missionaries themselves.

The notion of a mission, the sense of being sent out into the world for a special purpose, which sustained the ABCFM, has had wider repercussions inside American culture, past and present. Mission occupies center stage in the familiar narrative of the religious origins of the United States and its subsequent expansionist dynamics. It is thus intimately linked to the ideology of Manifest Destiny, as John Fiske noted in 1885: “I believe that the time will come . . . when it will be possible to speak of the United States as stretching from pole to pole. . . . Indeed, only when such a state of things has begun to be realized can civilization, as sharply demarcated from barbarism, be said to have fairly begun. Only then can the world be said to have become truly Christian.”<sup>16</sup> And today, the days of American missions and missionaries are far from over. Instead, observers have noted a veritable “explosion of US missions in the Global South,”<sup>17</sup> exemplified by, for example, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association ministries in Latin America or the World Gospel Mission in Africa. These missions are not just energized, like their predecessors, by the conviction that “it is God’s purpose that our nation be the spiritual burning bush, the beacon of light” to the rest of the world<sup>18</sup>; increasingly they are part of the global development and aid regimes and are thus at the heart of far-reaching transformations in many nation-states of the South in the direction of neoliberal scenarios of development that follow the US model.<sup>19</sup>

**II. Nineteenth-century American missions in Polynesia were part of a concerted effort to make the world “truly Christian” by remaking it in the image of white America.<sup>20</sup> To trace the work of missionaries in that part of the globe thus offers a window on early moments of the worldwide diffusion of US cultural material, a diffusion that by providing religious instruction provided in the same instant an**

“apprenticeship to a specific culture, to an everyday life as a cultural practice, . . . in which old ways of life are broken up and new ones set in place”—long before the days when US mass cultural products began to be distributed worldwide and with similar effects.<sup>21</sup>

However, the focus on US missions and missionaries abroad does more than offer an early register of the global outreach of US culture. As a distinct form of transnational US cultural export, through which normative ideas enshrined in the tradition of the West and especially the United States were released into the expanding spaces of worldwide capitalism and colonialism, mission also provides an important if somewhat neglected opportunity to fine-tune the apparatus of cultural critique.<sup>22</sup> Cornel West has been quoted as saying that one of the great failures of American Studies has been not to recognize the role religion has played in US mass culture—a mistake that the New American Studies can avoid by addressing more than it has done so far the role of American religion in the emergence of global cultural, social, and political formations.<sup>23</sup>

My paper is intended as a small contribution to such a project. Accordingly, its focus will be less on the minutiae of American missionary activities in Polynesia, in the successes and failures of winning converts,<sup>24</sup> than in the intercultural dynamics unleashed by these missions, with particular attention to the ways in which an Americanized version of Christianity engages an indigenous Other. Unfortunately, the record of these engagements is one-sided, to say the least. Missionary reports, in most cases, talk about, but not with, the religious Other, and if the missionized did in fact talk back to the missionaries, their voices and viewpoints are muffled at best. What little we know about local appropriation of US-identified cultural material or of acts of resistance to the assimilationist pressure of the missionaries we know only indirectly, by way of an operation that might be called “pagan ventriloquizing,”<sup>25</sup> i.e., through the voices of the missionaries themselves, as “a projected or simulated Other signification” (78).

I therefore need to turn to other sources. My choice in this paper has fallen on two of Herman Melville’s early novels, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). Both texts have for a long time been dismissed as juvenilia or at best valued for providing Orientalist entertainment, “the first to reveal to civilized people the charm of life in the islands of the Pacific.”<sup>26</sup> Both have, together with classics such as *Moby-Dick*, been recently reread in the context of the New American Studies for the intercultural engagements inscribed in them.<sup>27</sup> What is more, Melville’s writings are at the same time also readings, since they are engaging constantly and insistently a multitude of previous texts on the history of Euro-American presence in Polynesia, with particular emphasis on the texts written by the American missionaries.<sup>28</sup> What is more, Melville’s texts insert representations of the cultural export initiated by US missions into an inner-American debate about the direction and the values of the United States at mid-century.

III. In *Typee*, Melville uses the *donné* of a sailor jumping ship, “going native” and living for a while on the Marquesas Islands to present an “insider’s view” on

Pacific Islanders' indigenous cultures.<sup>29</sup> Recent readings of this novel have highlighted the progressive political freight of Melville's text, the way he displaces the setting and action of his novel onto foreign soil in order to criticize abuses inside the United States: "By using the 'imaginative experience' fundamental to the nineteenth-century travel narrative form, Melville hoped to transform the affections, as well as the intellectual attitudes, of his readers with respect to domestic slavery, Euro-American colonialism in Polynesia, and the reader's understanding of different cultures."<sup>30</sup>

Central to this rather broad program of American self-critique is Melville's sharp and sustained critique of missionary activities in the area. Already in the "Preface," the narrator draws attention to "a reverend order of men" and their "proceedings in the different quarters of the globe . . .," which in the narrator's assessment have been such that "that glorious cause . . . has not always been served by the proceedings of some of its advocates" (34). While Melville here still relies on the rhetorical strategy of *transitio*, not disclosing directly the objects of his critique, he is in the main body of the novel less reticent: "The missionaries may seek to disguise the matter as they will, but the facts are incontrovertible; and the devoutest Christian who visits that group [the Hawai'ian Islands] with an unbiased mind, must go away mournfully asking—'Are these, alas!, the fruits of twenty-five years of enlightening?'" (167–68).

Melville's text in this way does not just intervene in debates about domestic policy issues but he also draws his readers' attention to the interventions by Americans in the domestic affairs of other communities worldwide: the international and intercultural work performed by missionaries "sent on a heavenly errand" (37), who by the time of Melville's and his protagonist's arrival in Polynesia had almost completed their work as transnational cultural re-educators and forever transformed indigenous cultures all over the Pacific.

In an ironic passage, Melville in *Typee* highlights also the often invisible but nonetheless formidable links between home and abroad, as he describes the "tea-party excitements" among ABCFM-like circles where "benevolent-looking gentlemen in white cravats solicit alms, and old ladies in spectacles, and young ladies in sober russet gowns, contribute sixpences toward the creation of a fund, the object of which is to ameliorate the spiritual condition of the Polynesians, but whose end has almost invariably been to accomplish their temporal destruction!" (266).

*Typee* interrupts its underlying travel narrative framework to devote a whole chapter (chapter 26) to a discussion of the baneful effects of such cultural re-education, missionary style, which culminates in a long indictment: "no sooner are the images overturned, the temples demolished, and the idolators converted into nominal Christians, than disease, vice, and premature death make their appearance. The depopulated land is then recruited from the rapacious hordes of enlightened individuals who settle themselves within its borders, and clamorously announce the progress of the Truth" (266).

Melville's second novel, *Omoo* takes up this concern with renewed vigor.<sup>31</sup> The scene is somewhat similar to that of *Typee*; again we have a renegade sailor-protagonist whose temporary confinement on the islands of Hivarhoo allows for a narrative mix of tropical adventure tale and civilizational self-critique. In long passages of extradiegetic commentary, the narrator-protagonist registers repeatedly and in detail the destructive impact of the "ill-advised conduct" of the missionaries on the indigenous people (135).

In *Omoo*, Melville displaces some of his critique by ostensibly addressing it to French and English missions, but the diagnosis he offers applies to all European missions on the Pacific islands, and especially to those undertaken by Americans: "It is true that the religion of the missionaries has, with a great deal of evil, effected some good . . . but it has given birth to ignorance, hypocrisy, and a hatred of all other modes of faith, which was once foreign to the open and benevolent character of the Tahitian" (200–1). Melville puts additional weight on his observations by emphasizing their representative character: "Of the results which have flowed from the intercourse of foreigners with the Polynesians, including the attempts to civilize and Christianize them by the missionaries, Tahiti, on many accounts, is obviously the fairest practical example" (198). And as in *Typee*, he devotes a whole chapter, "Tahiti As It Is" (chapter 48), to counter the self-gratulatory accounts published by missionaries about their work in the Pacific.

Writing against the march of civilization thus understood, Melville takes care to claim for his tale the incontrovertible authority of the eyewitness—whose reliability has been of central concern in the novel's reception from Hawthorne's reading on to the present day: "In every statement connected with missionary operations, a strict adherence to facts has, of course, been scrupulously observed; and in some instance, it has even been deemed advisable to quote previous voyagers, in corroboration of what is offered as the fruit of the author's own observations. Nothing but an earnest desire for truth and good has led him to touch upon the subject at all" (*Omoo* 1–2). This autobiographical insistence has in the reception of Melville's novels worked against the author's intent. Since much of his critique was directed at the heart of a religious-civilizational mission that most of his contemporaries subscribed to, it is no surprise that attempts were made to diffuse some of this critique by explaining it in autobiographical terms: Melville's friend, Evert Duyckinck, after reading the manuscript of *Omoo*, writes to a friend, "He owes a sailor's grudge to the Missionaries, & pays it off at Tahiti" (quoted in *Omoo* xxi).

Over against such a view I want to insist that *Omoo* and *Typee* can be read as an effort to safeguard in the mode of fiction the cultural Otherness of indigenous people over against their appropriative acculturation undertaken by American missionaries. Symptomatic of the "interventionist and 'interpellative' ambition"<sup>32</sup> of US missionaries is, in Melville's view, the fact that they do not stop at simply converting the "natives" to Christianity but aim at nothing less than a total eradication of all inherited native practices and identifications:

When a native is baptized, his patronymic often gives offense to the missionaries, and they insist upon changing to something else whatever is objectionable therein. So, when Jeremiah came to the font, and gave his name as Narmo-Nana Po-Po (something equivalent to The-Darer-of-Devils-by-Night), the reverend gentleman officiating told him, that such a heathenish appellation would never do, and a substitute must be had. . . . Some highly respectable Christian appellations were then submitted, from which the candidate for admission into the Church was at liberty to choose. (*Omoo* 297)

While much of the polemical charge of *Typee* and *Omoo* is directed against missionaries and their form of transnational and transcultural “export,” the novels cannot wholly disentangle themselves from the cultural prejudices they criticize in the missionaries. Melville’s attempts to present such a transnationalist and, more importantly, transcultural canvas challenge and possibly exceed his as yet nascent abilities as transcultural storyteller. As Mita Banerjee has shown in an astute reading of both novels, the sympathetic stance toward indigenous cultures that is underwriting Melville’s representations of them “denies the Others discursively what he would grant them historically: the agency of ethnic resistance.”<sup>33</sup> The subaltern is not allowed to speak and is represented as the more or less passive victim of the smart messengers of God. Unlike the missionaries who view the indigenous people in the state of the “not-yet,” not-yet fully human but made so through the agency of conversion, cultural “‘citizens’ to be, that will never be,”<sup>34</sup> Melville fixes them in a timeless, prelapsarian state as the most ideal way of life: “Better will it be for them [the people in the *Typee* valley] to remain the happy and innocent heathens and barbarians that they now are, than, like the wretched inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands [today, Hawai’i] to enjoy the mere name of Christianity” (*Typee* 249).

**IV.** At the time of Melville’s writing, mission was without doubt one of the principal and lastingly effective ways in which the culture of “God’s own country” was mobilized in the struggle for material and symbolic control worldwide. Today, “as intellectual and even geopolitical justifications for expanding the American presence in the world are weakly stated or on the wane,” US missions, as has been mentioned, continue to be effective instruments in creating an “American moral empire,” even if their work is going on in different forms and with different strategies.<sup>35</sup> Thus religion as a form of cosmopolitanism is not a matter of historical interest alone; it is still one of the most significant ways in which “‘America’ signifies in the new global, political, economic, technological, and cultural circumstances that inform our postmodern and, one hopes, postnational future.”<sup>36</sup>

In the culturalist understanding that has sustained my reading of Melville’s critique of mission and missionaries, missionary work is an exemplar of

metaphysically sanctioned cultural export, directed at those who still live in traditional, “unenlightened,” “uncivilized” conditions, who, in short, have not yet “seen the light” of the true Christian faith. In this way, mission is also, I want to argue, a cultural performance that makes difference visible, in the very process of attempting to translate it into sameness. Thus, the key question surrounding religious cosmopolitanism, and mission as its principal instantiation, is pretty much the same that other forms of cosmopolitanism also beg: whether or not the cosmopolitan practices allow for the preservation of indigenous cultural Otherness.<sup>37</sup> On the evidence presented by Melville in his novels the answer would be “no” and US missions of his time stage, bluntly speaking, cultural contact as an act of “cultural murder.”<sup>38</sup>

However, the transcultural work performed by missions and missionaries is not a matter of historical interest alone. In our own time, when “the ‘Americanization’ of the modern missionary movement” has sent more US missionaries abroad than ever before in history,<sup>39</sup> US missions past and present offer also a critical perspective for the New American Studies and its programmatic interest “in the contradictory relation between difference and sameness out of which national narratives and national identities were fashioned.”<sup>40</sup> I have said above that mission is a particularly effective way of managing cultural difference—it does so by investing it with a temporal index. Whatever difference the missionaries may encounter, more often than not it has been their aim to transform this difference, at least in part, into sameness. This process, commonly called conversion in missionary contexts, is part of the overall process of erosion of local differences that has been identified as characteristic of globalization. It points to a future that is characterized by cultural sameness, a time “when all countries will have received the WORD,”<sup>41</sup> a word that, chances are, will be spoken in an American idiom.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Carlos Rowe, *The New American Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>2</sup> William V. Spanos, “American Studies in the ‘Age of the World Picture’: Thinking the Question of Language,” in *The Futures of American Studies*, ed. Donald E. Pease and Robyn Wiegman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 388.

<sup>3</sup> For details of US missions and their support for US expansion, see Ian R. Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America’s Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 72–80.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Weimann, “Einleitung: Repräsentation und Alterität diesseits/jenseits der Moderne,” in *Ränder der Moderne: Repräsentation und Alterität im (post)kolonialen Diskurs*, ed. Robert Weimann and Sabine Zimmermann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 7, my translation.

- <sup>5</sup> Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 19.
- <sup>6</sup> David H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971), 141–42.
- <sup>7</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33–40.
- <sup>8</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 26.
- <sup>9</sup> Pheng Cheah, “Introduction Part II: The Cosmopolitical—Today,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruch Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 31.
- <sup>10</sup> J. Andrew Kirk, *The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 50.
- <sup>11</sup> Günter H. Lenz, “Toward a Dialogics of International American Culture Studies: Transnationality, Border Discourses, and Public Culture(s),” in Pease and Wiegman, *Futures of American Studies*, 468.
- <sup>12</sup> Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 43.
- <sup>13</sup> Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Islands* (Canandaigua: H. D. Goodwin, 1855), 60–61.
- <sup>14</sup> T. Walter Herbert, Jr., *Marquesan Encounters: Melville and the Meaning of Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 27.
- <sup>15</sup> Samuel John Mills, quoted in Charles A. Maxfield, “The Formation and Early History of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions,” Maxfield Books, <http://www.maxfieldbooks.com/ABC FM.html> (accessed April 22, 2010).
- <sup>16</sup> John Fiske, “Manifest Destiny,” *Harper's* 70, March 1885, 588.
- <sup>17</sup> Julie Hearn, “The ‘Invisible NGO’: US Evangelical Missions in Kenya,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 1 (2002): 35.
- <sup>18</sup> Ramon Orosa, quoted in Steve Brouwer, Paul Gifford, and Susan D. Rose, *Exporting the American Gospel: Global Christian Fundamentalism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 76.
- <sup>19</sup> For a detailed analysis of the implications of especially US evangelical missions in US political agendas, see Hearn, “The ‘Invisible NGO.’”
- <sup>20</sup> For an extended argument about this project, see Tyrrell, *Reforming the World*, 85–89; and Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889–1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), ix, 26–29, 226.

<sup>21</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 63. Jameson is here thinking of the global cultural work performed by US mass cultural products, especially the Hollywood film as “a name for a business that makes money but also for fundamental late-capitalist cultural revolution” (63).

<sup>22</sup> Theologians have long recognized missions as a model of religious “cross-cultural communication.” See Kirk, *Mission of Theology*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Cornel West, quoted in Fredric Jameson, *Jameson on Jameson: Conversations on Cultural Marxism*, ed. Ian Buchanan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 221.

<sup>24</sup> The most prominent of these records is probably William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches* (1838); for a historical overview, see Niel Gunson, *Messengers of Grace: Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>25</sup> This term is a variation on the concept of “ethnic ventriloquizing,” as investigated in an excellent way by Mita Banerjee’s book-length study on *Ethnic Ventriloquism: Literary Minstrelsy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Archibald McMechan, “The Best Sea Story Ever Written,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 7 (1899): 121.

<sup>27</sup> I am thinking here of John Carlos Rowe’s *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Donald E. Pease’s “C. L. R. James, *Moby-Dick*, and the Emergence of Transnational American Studies,” in Pease and Wiegman, *Futures of American Studies*, 135–63.

<sup>28</sup> For an extended analysis of how much Melville’s novels are actually based on missionary writings, see Herbert, *Marquesan Encounters*; and also John Samson, “Profaning the Sacred: Melville’s *Omoo* and Missionary Narratives,” *American Literature* 56, no. 4 (1984): 496–509.

<sup>29</sup> Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, ed. and intro. George Woodcock (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1972), hereafter cited in text.

<sup>30</sup> Rowe, *Literary Culture*, 78.

<sup>31</sup> Herman Melville, *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas*, ed. and intro. Mary K. Bercau Edwards (London: Penguin, 2007), hereafter cited in text.

<sup>32</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 105.

<sup>33</sup> Banerjee, *Ethnic Ventriloquism*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> Timothy Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 34.

<sup>35</sup> Brouwer et al., *Exporting the American Gospel*, 14. The debate is also reflected in H. E. Baber's essay, "In Defence of Proselytizing," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 3 (2000): 334–37.

<sup>36</sup> Rowe, *New American Studies*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Timothy Brennan has pointed out a way to critique this brand of cosmopolitanism for being essentially "local while denying its local character" (Brennan, *Wars of Position*, 205).

<sup>38</sup> For the concept of "cultural murder," see Stephen Greenblatt, "Cultural Mobility: An Introduction," in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, with Ines G. Županov, Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus, Heike Paul, Pál Nyíri, and Friederike Pannewick (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Hearn, "The 'Invisible NGO,'" 38.

<sup>40</sup> Donald E. Pease, "National Narratives, Postnational Narration," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43, no. 1 (1997): 5.

<sup>41</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 105.

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# Planetary Citizenship

Alfred Hornung

In the search for new models of political and cultural affiliation, writers and critics have traversed a number of positions and disciplines. Postmodern and postcolonial literature, formerly written and discussed from the national reference point of the major colonial languages, took on a new dimension with the dominant political agenda in the 1990s, which advocated the thrust of globalization as a solution to the world's problems. In the familiar division between the capitalistic Northern hemisphere and the impoverished global South, President Clinton called for more globalization at the 2000 World Economic Forum in Davos, characterizing the economic success of his presidency.<sup>1</sup> Social scientists were quick to develop theories and concepts in line with the global political agenda. They ranged from the willing embracement of globalization to new concepts of cosmopolitanism, programmatically announced in "The Cosmopolitan Manifesto" by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, taking up Immanuel Kant's idea of hospitality granted to all strangers.<sup>2</sup> Representatives of cultural and ethnic studies, in turn, were more critical of these concepts and pointed to the underlying political implications of such ideas, promoted by capitalist nations under the leadership of the United States of America. Evaluating the fate of displaced migrants and their unstable places of residence, cultural critics of ethnic writers moved away from the national frame of reference to an analysis of local factors of migrants' lives and their potential construction of a sense of place. This position also included a tendency to transcend the national frame of philological interpretations for the sake of transnational dimensions. While America represented the locus of global economic structures, which expressed itself in the superficial equation of globalization and Americanization, academic disciplines concerned with national literatures and cultures moved beyond these borders. Shelley Fisher Fishkin's launching of transnational American Studies in the American Studies Association extended American Studies activities to the whole world, while inviting at the same time Americanists from all over to share in a transnational academic enterprise, seeing non-American colleagues as equal partners in the common research project.<sup>3</sup> Comparatists, likewise, felt the need to move beyond disciplinary boundaries, i.e., the familiar European literatures, to establish an encompassing frame of "world literature" in David Damrosch's formulation.<sup>4</sup> More radically, Gayatri Spivak speaks of the "death of the discipline" and redefines the nature of comparative literature as a field in cooperation with area studies and ethnic/cultural studies, a vital interaction between scholars of the Northern hemisphere and the South of the nonhegemonic languages.<sup>5</sup> Such an interaction would transcend the narrow frame of European languages, ignore the political boundaries of areas drawn up after the Second World War, and leave behind the deterritorialized positions of cultural studies. "In search of countermodels to . . . nation-based concepts of

identity,” Ursula Heise argues in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, “a wide range of theorists instead presented identities shaped by hybridity, creolization, *mestizaje*, migration, borderlands, diaspora, nomadism, exile, and deterritorialization not only as more politically progressive but also as potential grounds for resistance to national hegemonies.”<sup>6</sup> In this situation, critics like Paul Gilroy from the position of race, Gayatri Spivak from a post-Marxist perspective, and Ursula Heise from an environmentalist point of view have suggested the concept of planetarity that I would like to apply to an interpretation of transcultural life writings by the Japanese Canadian David Suzuki and the multiethnic American Barack Obama.<sup>7</sup> From different points of view they have practiced and advocated a form of planetary citizenship. These practitioners of transcultural life writing, I will argue, preceded and anticipated theories of a new cosmopolitanism in their practice of a planetary citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

Gayatri Spivak’s abolition of disciplinary boundaries and political areas for the sake of her concept of planetarity is motivated by her serious belief in and concern for a new humanist attitude toward the less fortunate people on Earth. For her, “planetary” as “an alternate term for continental, global, worldly” differs decisively from those terms since it encapsulates the human concern: “The globe is on our computers,” she writes, “the planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system.”<sup>9</sup> “To be human is to be intended toward the other,” an ethical position that she also locates in such “transcendental figurations [as] mother, nation, god, nature,” which for her are “names of alterity, planetary subjects rather than global agents” (73). Such planetary subjects emerge from many contemporary examples of transcultural life writing, which abound in many areas of the world. The writers or practitioners of these transcultural life writings have usually experienced multiple migrations across the globe, suffered exile and displacement especially prominent since the Second World War. Personal accounts of Europeans in flight from their perpetrators finding residence in England, Canada, or the United States include authors such as the Polish Canadian Lisa Appignanesi, the Americans of Indian descent Bharati Mukherjee and Meena Alexander, the African Caribbean writer Dionne Brand, the many Nigerian writers in exile in Europe and the US like Chinedu Ogoke, Wole Soyinka, and Chinua Achebe, the Chinese Americans or Chinese Canadians like Maxine Hong Kingston, Wayson Choy, and Michael David Kwan. In Europe writers like Assia Djebar and Rachid Boudjedra from Algeria, Black British writers, or Turkish German writers like Feridun Zaimoğlu come to mind among many others.

Common to all of these transcultural life writers are the experience of multiple migrations, repeated efforts of adjustment and acculturation in different places of residence and problematic political allegiance to a loose concept of nationality. Faced with the predicament of their personal, often unresolved situations, these writers reach out to a community of fellow sojourners with equally undefined in-between political status and they practice Spivak’s intention of alterity. They thus constitute superior examples of “planetary subjects” counteracting the global economic schemes and Google Map technologies.

The Japanese Canadian David Suzuki is a case in point. Born in 1936 in Vancouver of second-generation Japanese parents, he grows up as a monolingual Canadian citizen who rejects his parents' Japanese heritage in his attempt to deny his ethnic background and to ward off discrimination. Pearl Harbor, however, destroys his efforts to integrate into Canadian society. Not only is his family resettled from British Columbia to the interior provinces, but his grandparents are also forcefully repatriated to Japan where they die of culture shock shortly thereafter. In two partially overlapping transcultural autobiographies, *Metamorphosis: Stages in a Life* (1987) and *The Autobiography* (2006), he relates these discriminatory events and the beginning of his academic career as a natural scientist, which he pursues not in Canada, but in the United States where he is trained as a geneticist with degrees in biology from Amherst and in zoology from the University of Chicago.<sup>10</sup> Yet he also experiences discrimination in the US. During his research associateship in the Biology Division of Tennessee's Oak Ridge National Lab (1961–1962) he aligns with the cause of his African American colleagues and joins the NAACP. Eventually he becomes a very successful professor of genetics at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and starts a television career with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which from 1979 on turns into a full-time job as host of the popular series *The Nature of Things with David Suzuki*. This transposition of teaching in the classroom to a global TV audience seems to be a final step in his move toward an ecological consciousness and planetary citizenship. It is an important stage on the way to change Canadian society, and by implication Northern societies, from discriminatory and alienated attitudes into, what Paul Gilroy calls, a culture of conviviality that means nothing less than a concern for local conditions of life in which people learn “to live with alterity without becoming anxious or fearful.”<sup>11</sup>

Suzuki's two autobiographies document how the once predominantly negative implications of racial difference have given way to a fruitful cooperation of all humans for the sake of the preservation of the environment. The Japanese racial legacy, which had still dominated most of *Metamorphosis*, disappears for the sake of a postethnic position and allows him to concentrate on communicating the status of nature to a transnational audience. Thirteen out of eighteen chapters of *The Autobiography* are dedicated to a description of ecological projects. They are based on his first encounter as a young professor in genetics with First Nations people when he learns from them a basic respect for people and nature. Immigrants to Canada as well as environmentalists—he argues—have ignored the “broader cultural and spiritual needs” of First Nations and their right “to remain who they are.”<sup>12</sup> In continuation of his father's “Japanese tradition of nature-worship” (395), he is involved in many environmental projects worldwide and has been able to influence political decisions at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the Kyoto Convention on Climate Change. The David Suzuki Foundation has become a planetary project in which he has created a global connection of all indigenous people in his contacts with Indians in the Brazilian rain forest, the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea, the Aborigines in Australia and Indonesia. The goal is a planetary alliance

of all nature people and their common goal of the preservation of planet Earth. The transformation of his scientific and anthropological insights into an ecological program is the basis of a development of what Ursula Heise calls an “ideal of ecocosmopolitanism or environmental world citizenship.”<sup>13</sup> Suzuki’s belief in the interdependence of all human beings on Earth, regardless of their ethnicity or race, appears to be one of the essential requirements for the well-being of multiethnic societies. Hence his transnational “Declaration of Interdependence” succeeds the national “Declaration of Independence” of the United States<sup>14</sup>:

At this Turning Point in our relationship with Earth, we work for an evolution from dominance to partnership, from fragmentation to connection, from insecurity to interdependence. (277)

This idealistic belief of an environmental activist could fruitfully be combined with the social theories of Niklas Luhmann and his advocacy of an ecological communication presented in his 1989 book of the same title. For Luhmann, ecological communication refers to “any communication about the environment that seeks to bring about a change in the structures of the communicative system that is society.”<sup>15</sup>

The combination of both positions can possibly be achieved by political leaders such as Barack Obama, whose autobiography *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (1995; new edition published in 2004) can be considered a political form of transcultural life writing, which is informed by planetary imagination and consciousness. As Obama tells us in his introduction, the book was originally solicited by publishers in the 1990s when he became the first black president of the *Harvard Law Review* and had achieved some national fame. The book was supposed to satisfy “America’s hunger for any optimistic sign from the racial front.”<sup>16</sup> Concerned over the difficulties of writing such a book on demand, he withdrew from public life to the isolation of Bali and wrote his own life story rather than a factual book, whose itinerary takes him from Hawaii to Indonesia, back to Hawaii to the continental United States and eventually to Africa. It is the story of a life situated between Asia, Africa, and America. His early life in Honolulu with an absent African father and a white American mother is multiethnic from the beginning. The geographical location of the Hawaiian islands between Asia and America, the origin of their settlement by Polynesian people since the fourth century, and the intervention of the British colonizers and the annexation of Hawaii by the Americans make for a very multifaceted history and the visible presence of a multiethnic culture. In addition, Hawaii has also been a military outpost of the United States and a stepping-stone for Chinese and Japanese on their way to the US. All of these political, military, ethnic, and geographical dimensions underlie Obama’s early life, which allow him to grow up as a child of color in circumstances where multiethnicity and multiple languages are the norm rather than the exception. The Christian and Western values received from his white grandparents are contrasted with Indonesian culture and

“a brand of Islam that could make room for the remnants of more ancient animist and Hindu faiths” (37). His decision to leave Hawaii to further his education on the continental United States, as a high school student in Los Angeles and an undergraduate at Columbia University in New York, is also an education in African American politics and culture with which he begins to identify. “Whatever my father might say,” he writes, “I knew it was too late to ever truly claim Africa as my home. And if I had come to understand myself as a black American, and was understood as such, that understanding remained unanchored to place. What I needed was a community” (115). This planetary search for a community leads him from the New York business world to the South Side of Chicago. It is here that he reconnects culturally with Africa by meeting two of his African siblings and an African American high school principal who tells him about African history, geography, and cultural traditions, which—in his opinion—represent ““a different value orientation—something to counteract the materialism and individualism and instant gratification that’s fed to them [students]. I teach them that Africans are a communal people. That Africans respect elders. Some of my European colleagues feel threatened by this, but I tell them it’s not about denigrating other cultures. It’s about giving these young people a base for themselves. Unless they’re rooted in their own traditions, they won’t ever be able to appreciate what other cultures have to offer”” (259).

In the summer of 1988, just before entering Harvard Law School, Obama traveled to Europe and Africa, where he spent five weeks and met many of his paternal relatives in Kenya for the first time. I think it is significant that the later President of the United States ends his autobiography in Africa without referring to his admission to Harvard Law School or his professional achievements. And it is also remarkable that this visit in Kenya is not described as a nostalgic or utopian return to the homeland but rather as a realistic assessment of the differences between his African relatives and himself. He learns to accept the critical distance of these African relatives to black people living in the United States, questioning the status of the African American diaspora to which he as the descendant of an African father does not belong. Thus he distinguishes between himself as the son of an African whose dreams he has inherited and his wife Michelle a black American and a descendant of slaves. In line with my argument, I would like to situate Obama’s implicit formulation of a planetary citizenship between the dreams from his African father and the reality of his American life. To what extent this planetary citizenship can be related to his “Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream,” expressed in his many political speeches, collected in *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), remains to be seen. Yet there are signs in his political life that he has shifted “the audacity of hope,” which was the subject of one of Rev. Jeremiah Wright’s sermons discussed at length in *Dreams from My Father* (291–95), from the religious to the political arena. This also implies the progress from an individual to a community of people and his credo of “Yes We Can” taken up all over the world.

This brings me to my final point and my conclusion in which I want to address the transformation of the promises of dreams and the principle of hope

into the political reality of a planetary citizenship. There is no doubt that both the natural scientist David Suzuki and the lawyer Barack Obama have lived and practiced such a planetary citizenship in their dedication to environmental causes and new global initiatives for the improvement of the conditions of life on Earth and for a new alliance of all people. The many demonstrations of their environmental activism and political actions originate in their transcultural lives and have recently been recognized by the world community. One day after Barack Obama was chosen as the Laureate for the Nobel Peace Prize, David Suzuki won the Right Livelihood Award, which is considered the alternate Nobel Peace Prize. The choices of these globally respected award committees can also be interpreted as an advocacy of a planetary citizenship; for the preservation of the planet Earth rests indeed, in Paul Gilroy's words, on "cosmopolitan solidarity and moral agency."<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> William J. Clinton, keynote address (World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, January 29, 2000), available online at <http://www.mail-archive.com/ctrl@listserv.aol.com/msg36368.html>.

<sup>2</sup> See Ulrich Beck, "Introduction: The Cosmopolitan Manifesto," in *World Risk Society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1999), 1–18; and Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. and intro. Pauline Kleingeld, trans. David L. Colclasure (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Culture: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57.

<sup>4</sup> See David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ursula Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*; and Heise, *Sense of Place*.

<sup>8</sup> See Alfred Hornung, "Transcultural Life Writing," in *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature*, ed. Coral Ann Howells and Eva-Marie Kröller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 536–55.

<sup>9</sup> Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 72.

<sup>10</sup> David Suzuki, *David Suzuki: The Autobiography* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2006); and David Suzuki, *Metamorphosis: Stages in a Life* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1987).

- <sup>11</sup> Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, xv.
- <sup>12</sup> Suzuki, *Autobiography*, 133.
- <sup>13</sup> Heise, *Sense of Place*, 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Suzuki, *Autobiography*, 275–77.
- <sup>15</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Ecological Communication* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 28.
- <sup>16</sup> Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), xiii.
- <sup>17</sup> Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, xv.

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## Side-by-Side with You: The Common as Foundational Figure

William Boelhower

Citizenship, cosmopolitan democracy, human rights, globalization, world citizenship, global civil society: all of these categories, most of which Günter Lenz has explicitly marked out for us in his alert and synthetic introduction, suggest a stark new figure of political thought and space not so much for a transnationally sensitive epistemic community within the American Studies Association as for humankind the world over. But surely these two realities are inseparable, as we will see. It is this *Denkbild* (conceptual figure) and its accompanying protocols that I would like to outline here—namely, that of common humanity, common wealth, and common ground. For it is this new figure of the common that must peremptorily serve as the foundation for any serious discussion of the above categories.

That all of the above categories have their origin in a single synoptic figure becomes more obvious when we consider that they all hinge upon a highly appealing and now irrepressible *planetary point of view*. If today we need to rethink our traditional political forms, ideologies, and rules, it is because we can no longer help acknowledging that planet Earth has become a rather snug and increasingly familiar global village. This familiarity is due to the record number of people now inhabiting our planet as well as to the sophisticated technologies of transport, information, and war and the current economic, financial, and migratory networks that embrace it.

What further compels us to latch on to the figure of the common as immediately responsive and appropriately foundational—whether in terms of technocratic governance or an assemblage of confederated governments (policies vs. politics) is beside the point—is the insouciant devastation of the world that is taking place before our very eyes on a daily basis. As a result, as David Held has noted in his book *Global Covenant*, our planet is now made up of “overlapping communities of fate.”<sup>1</sup> At stake here is not just our well-being but our very survival. The ozone hole, the increasing frequency and intensity of hurricanes, tidal waves, earthquakes, nuclear waste management, rising sea levels, contagious diseases like AIDS and mad cow, melting glaciers, diminishing resources, advancing deserts—all of these have literally put us in the same careening boat.

In the third book of their trilogy, *Commonwealth*, the authors Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out what many intellectuals the world over have begun to acknowledge: nature is “the common in its most expansive figure.”<sup>2</sup> And when thinking of nature, we must also be sure to include our own species, *homo sapiens*. To a significant extent, it is the abuse and exploitation of nature that requires us to go beyond politics as we now know it to our common ground as inhabitants of a diminished and humbled planet. In order to do so, the French intellectual Bruno Latour suggests we behold the world through the filtering lens

of cosmograms, by which traditional definitions of the political would be perceived strictly in terms of political ecology.<sup>3</sup> If one mentions milk, for example, one needs to elaborate a series that includes crops like corn and hay, climatic conditions, fields for cultivation, the labor involved, and so on. Thus, facts become ecofacts; rights, ecorights; and citizens, ecocitizens. The next time around, as we conspire hurriedly to make the world over, we need to do it ecopolitically, with people and nature converging in common cause and fully mindful of the updraft of concerns only our new conceptual figure can produce and press forward from the proper point of view.

Any plan or policy that consciously seeks to ignore or transcend the figural realm of the common very likely represents still more technocratic brooding from the evidently depressed tradition of classical liberalism. If we consider only the most recent carnival of disasters dished out randomly by an overly exploited and reeling nature, and our own stupefied attempts to deal with them as common global emergencies, it is hard to disagree with political scientist Daniele Archibugi that a worldwide *res publica* already exists,<sup>4</sup> certainly not as a *reductio ad unum* (a reduction of the common to a homogeneous One) but, quite to the contrary, as a visually recognizable image of the vertiginous, suffering, migratory, and often unspeakably abandoned multitude.

As literary critic Patrick McGee, my colleague at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, writes in the closing lines of his recent book *Theory and the Common from Marx to Badiou*, “it is perhaps more important to look into the heart of that which is most common in order to discover something in me more than me.”<sup>5</sup> There could be no better articulation of our existential condition of *esse-cum*—being-with or being-in-common—than McGee’s. Our very singularity as human beings depends on our ontological status of being-with-others, side-by-side-in-nature. Indeed, our singularity is what makes us one with common humanity, and it is this status that bestows on us our life, our common wealth. Thus, we no longer think of the political as formed by the dyad particular/universal but rather by that of singular/common. With this ontological wealth in mind we can now broach the conceptual figure of the common and seek to shed some light on its foundational status, foundational not only for the concepts of citizenship and cosmopolitan democracy, global citizenship and global civil society, but also for human rights discourse.

What, then, is this figure of the common that such politically diverse intellectuals as Daniele Archibugi and coauthors Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri allude to in their recent books *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens* and *Commonwealth*, respectively?<sup>6</sup> And we might add, why has the common become so politically and culturally pivotal in the last decade or so? Part of the answer, as I have already suggested, lies in its new visibility. For the mass media now thrust this figure upon us daily and in a variety of guises: the suffering masses overwhelmed by natural disasters and terrorist bombings, the plight of migrants and refugees, sex slaves, the armies of unemployed, “illegal aliens,” border control, international drug rings, and the distribution of healthcare benefits to noncitizens, to name some of the salient ones.

If the common has become more patently destinal, it is because politics have become necessarily biopolitical, both in their attempt to address an expanding notion of human rights and, equally important, to cope with the forces and processes of the natural world as these affect our daily lives. But we also need to address a methodological issue here. In founding the science of sociology, Emile Durkheim in his *Les regles de la methode sociologique* formulated a famous rule that can help us to approach the expansive and almost unassignable reality of the common more sensibly.<sup>7</sup> That rule, according to which only a social fact can explain another social fact, reminds us that the common in its own right is a space from which to make sense of things and draw them together. As Antonio Negri points out in his *Cinque lezioni di metodo su moltitudine e impero*, “when a new configuration in the historical fabric appears, we will also have a similar turn in the epistemological perspective.”<sup>8</sup> In short, changes in the historical context and in methodological turns are strictly related. Indeed, the historical novelty of the figure of the common also entails a new methodological sensibility. The two work strictly in tandem.

We need to keep in mind the ontological status of the common as a foundational being-with in order to appreciate that this being-with produces a common space or, if you will, what we have in common (including resources like air and water, human rights, desires and needs, and even the future as an unfolding horizon of expectation). In turn, what we have in common more familiarly generates an endless number of identifiable common places that manifest themselves in various political, economic, cultural, and natural arenas. Global public opinion, newspapers, public squares, outdoor markets, streets, crowds of all kinds, barber shops, bars, political movements, civic initiatives, the use of national parks, and so forth, are all common places that have their own temporal rhythms, durations, purposes, and spatial codes. One of the most obvious and important features of the common is language and the ability of people to communicate through language. As free as the air, this feature can never be privatized or put entirely at the service of any political party.

Etymologically, common knowledge distinguishes itself as *knowledge-with*, as its Latin root, *conscientia* (or *cum-scientia*), indicates. Interestingly, *conscientia* (the common’s epistemology of knowledge-with) is the etymon for both moral conscience and consciousness. The two words were once closely related, as the reflections of Luther, Calvin, Rousseau, and Kant bear out.<sup>9</sup> The common’s proper way to knowledge of itself is through an acute awareness of being-with as knowledge-with. This point is crucial for scholars and intellectuals affiliated with the university, for we do not always acknowledge the realm of the common—or the fact that we share a common humanity with others—automatically. To paraphrase a passage of Deleuze and Guattari’s from their late book *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* (1991), we might say, the academic scholar or political scientist must become a nontheorist in order for nonpolitical theory to appreciate the conceptual figure of the common.<sup>10</sup>

The point here is that the common stubbornly resides in the realm of *subpolitics*, which, we might add, is also the realm of indexicality, metonymy, and

literality.<sup>11</sup> These last three features the common never sheds, which helps to explain why it defies being ordered and transfixed into hierarchies. As Jacques Ranciere has noted in *On the Shores of Politics*, “the demos is the union of a centripetal force and a centrifugal force, the living paradox of a political collectivity formed from apolitical individuals.”<sup>12</sup> The common’s figurative expressions, its common places, come from below, so to speak, and remain eternally open-ended.<sup>13</sup> The common can often be located in the unexpressed point of view of the multitude. We might even say that this point of view is the common as subject insofar as it provisionally acts and produces itself. Common humanity has its own urgencies and gathering points.

We should also add that the point of view of the common is more than a representation, since it is both a figure of knowledge (*conscientia*) and a way and place of being (*esse-cum*, being-with; *inter-esse*, being-among). Thus, if one cannot always pin the common down semantically, one can still point to it, stand side by side with it, and experience its enfolding, if somewhat anonymous, authority. In short, one can say about it, “here I stand,” and feel even sublimely pierced by the common’s moral force as expressed, say, in an antiglobal slogan aired at the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy, a few years ago: “You are G8, we are 6 billion.” Such moral authority reminds us that the common is best knowable and best experienced through collective social practices and biopolitical struggles.<sup>14</sup>

Another popular slogan that introduces us to a further dimension of the common is “No Globalization without Representation.” In a rather sly way here we are being reminded of the outflanking, subjective authority of the *demos* or, if you will, the multitude understood as the figurative space of the common. And it goes without saying that inside this space we have an irreducible plurality, an absent center. As the political scientist Chantal Mouffe pleads in her book *On the Political*, we need to learn to think pluralistically, and for her that inevitably means agonistically.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, it is the realistic vocation of politics to reduce antagonism to agonism, violence to discussion. In Mouffe’s view, while we can and should overcome conflict, we cannot hope to eliminate the political realm by means of technocratic policy-making. We need to use the political sphere as a unique space for the exercise of agonistic partisanship. There are two extremely different ways of doing so: according to a regime of atomistic individualism or according to the transindividual subject prefigured in the image of the common. The figure of the common is especially comfortable with Mouffe’s call for a politically multipolar world.

As Hardt and Negri state at the very outset of their book *Commonwealth*, “We also want to emphasize . . . the need to institute and manage a world of common wealth, focusing on and expanding our capacities for collective production and self-government.”<sup>16</sup> From the opposite end of the political spectrum, Daniele Archibugi also sees the need to create “a global commonwealth.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, while there may be strong agreement here on the need to reimagine a political order that is truly planetary, we still need to be very clear about what the *common* means and how we might best approach it. For, as I have tried to argue in these few pages, the common has its own ontological status, its

own point of view, and its own way of relating to the world. As Gilles Deleuze reminds us in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, “different kinds of knowledge are also different ways of living, different modes of existence.”<sup>18</sup> To delve into the common we must adopt a different mental discipline.

Each of us—whether we be academic scholars, bus drivers, state senators, war veterans, terminally ill, political scientists, janitors, hairdressers, state governors, cooks, supreme court judges, yard workers, mill hands, medical doctors, students, care workers, Wall-Street brokers, unemployed, undocumented aliens, bus drivers, refugees, prisoners, or the elderly (all people who belong together because of their common humanity)—I repeat, each of us is a crossing-point for a variety of political orders, from the local, state, and regional to the hemispheric and the global. Each of us, as inhabitants of planet Earth, has a stake in imagining and producing a global commonwealth. And that planetary point of view is anchored in our own backyard and our own neighborhood, as we choose or do not choose to be conscious of our fundamental and inevitable condition of being-in-common. As a unique political order that cuts across all of the other orders mentioned above, the common must continually be evoked, configured, produced and reproduced.

That is why it is so urgent to make the common our *foundational political figure*, our new comprehensive image of political thought and space. For, contrary to other imagined figures of a more derivative kind, the common holds and the common abides, even as it pitches, flares, unfolds, and contracts. In truth, we cannot leave it behind or even get outside of it. The collective point of view is a way of holding global space in common; as such it provides us with a figure of thought and place on which we can build a global political order. At any rate, we cannot do without it. As we watch the daily news, we cannot help but notice that the common as I have figured it here holds the gaze of the world. From it we must start over, again and again.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Held, *Global Covenant: The Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 168.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), 181.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno Latour, *Un monde pluriel mais commun* (Paris: Editions de l’Aube, 2005), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Daniele Archibugi, *The Global Commonwealth of Citizens: Toward Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick McGee, *Theory and the Common from Marx to Badiou* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 200.

<sup>6</sup> See Archibugi, *Global Commonwealth*; and Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*.

- <sup>7</sup> See Émile Durkheim, “Chapter I: What Is a Social Fact?” in *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, ed. and intro. Steven Lukes, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1982), 50–59.
- <sup>8</sup> Antonio Negri, *Cinque lezioni di metodo su moltitudine e impero* (Soveria Mannelli, IT: Rubbettino, 2003), 31.
- <sup>9</sup> See Mario Miegge, *Che cos'è la coscienza storica?* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2004), 15–43.
- <sup>10</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 16.
- <sup>11</sup> See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Métaphysiques cannibales*, trans. Oiara Bonilla (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), 73–74.
- <sup>12</sup> Jacques Rancière, *On the Shores of Politics*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007), 15.
- <sup>13</sup> See Chantal Mouffe, *Sul politico* [On the Political], trans. Sandro D'Alessandro (Milan: Mondadori, 2007), 40–47.
- <sup>14</sup> See Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 121.
- <sup>15</sup> Mouffe, *Sul politico*, 144.
- <sup>16</sup> Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, xiii.
- <sup>17</sup> Archibugi, *Global Commonwealth*, 83.
- <sup>18</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 289.

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