

INTRODUCTION: DIVERSITY AND/OR DIFFERENCE?¹

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For decades now, a broad debate on the dynamics of cultural change has been engaging the extensive fields of literary and cultural theory and criticism as well as interdisciplinary studies. This debate has been largely concerned with emancipatory arguments for or against *identity*—along with its constitutive counterpart, *difference*, and its proliferation into *diversity*. In the process, *post-identity* has emerged with the aim not to deny or cancel out historical identities, but to rearticulate them away from fixity. As these arguments intercept one another in often irreconcilable networks of power, their terms are necessarily unstable, changing through mutating historical contexts and needs. Indeed, they have often changed precisely in response to the hegemonizing impulses of language and culture; in this sense, *difference* and *diversity*, initially understood as performative articulations of cultural change, have been increasingly used to refer to the multiplication of sameness instead. Projects to revise such arguments as well as the theories they underscore are both strengthened and thwarted by the fact that, just as you can only produce change in the language of

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whatever it is you are changing, the very terms of emancipatory praxis inevitably feed on, and into, the constraining discourses they seek to resist within increasingly hegemonizing channels of knowledge (re)production.

Various efforts of cultural mobilization have apparently faded into this disturbing impasse, which at its extreme yields the kind of argument that goes something like this: 'The ways we think about mobility and emancipation are necessarily constrained by the received forms of knowing we rely on for their intelligibility, so all efforts for cultural change are bound to be co-opted into cultural inertia instead. Culture is ultimately deterministic, then, and there is no possibility for individual or even collective agency.' Far from endorsing this one-way logic—which may recall, by the way, a certain 'free'-market mentality that holds no constraints on (cultural) consumption, only on (cultural) labor—, various critics and theorists have been calling attention to the potentiality for cultural mobility embedded in the structures of constraint itself. This collection of essays was organized with an eye to such potentiality [*dynameos*], and with the aim to evidence a range of critical perspectives that it opens up.²

The very title of this issue, while puzzling perhaps, is telling of the discursive quandary it seeks to engage. In considering our tentative titles, we could not help but run up against a series of drawbacks. To give just one example, take 'minority studies': what you have is a title that in the current context of cultural reification runs the risk of suggesting 'studies of, on, or about minorities,' wherein 'minorities' get taken for granted as such, thus feeding into the reiteration rather than the critique of the postmodern expansion of categorized difference. Thus it might merely confirm its face value: the still conventional idea that minoritization mirrors something 'culturally natural' or irrevocable about (the majority of) individuals, for some difference or other, getting both homogenized and atomized within increasingly diverse sites of inoculation—and, what's more, in ways that imply them as *objects* of a scrutinizing gaze, constituting their counterpart 'majorities'

as legitimate *subjects* by contrast. Put simply, it might imply that ‘minorities’ were the object of this issue, whereas our focus is on the discursive mechanisms and naturalized effects that produce them as such. We found that ‘minority studies’ was not useful to us, therefore, because it cannot unsettle, in the space of a title, the effects for which it stands, and which it can therefore only re-produce—once again, replacing *reality* all too easily with “*how things are.*”

Although these confining effects could not be farther removed from the emancipatory aims most likely underlying such a hypothetical title, they are nevertheless effects which have prevailed in various fields of cultural critique and theory concerned with unsettling hegemonizing discourses and their diversifying strategies of fixity or hierarchic control. As long-standing debates have revealed, particularly through groundbreaking critical divisions within feminist theories since the 1970s, emancipatory projects are not exempt from the constraining discourses they inhabit, either as they necessarily reenact the centrality of those discourses by opposing them, or as they reduplicate them within internal group divisions. This is not to say, however, that emancipatory projects cannot be recast anew, or that they are useless or avoidable, even as they now stand—anemic, perhaps for still grappling with the fact that all resistance is bound to what it seeks to dismiss.

While it remains urgent to bring to central focus the still banished issue of minoritization and its packaged productions, such efforts require attention to how those productions are re-made in the process. An eye to the open-ended dynamics of re-presentation, while confronting its objectifying effects, has demanded that criticism shift from focusing on discursive identities that are supposedly *fixed* (in both senses: *static*, as if *repaired*) within the structures that naturalize hierarchy, toward exposing the mechanisms on which the very structural *fixation* (in both senses: *fetish*,³ and *hold*) of hierarchy depends. Thus Janet E. Halley argues that coherentist assumptions regarding members of minority groups is bad coalition politics because it “promotes the idea that the

traits of subordinated groups, rather than the dynamics of subordination, are the normatively important thing to notice" (2000, 51). In this light, the (re)production of cultural constraints *within* the very discourses that emerge in quests for cultural mobility is a perplexing issue that is still urgent to engage—*not as an alibi* for renouncing agency towards change, but as a fact to be encompassed and inquired into within our own critical and theoretical practice.⁴

Pointing to possibilities of transformative agency from within the contrived dynamics of representational power itself, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues for a "*strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" to "undo a massive historiographic metalepsis and 'situate' the effect of the subject as subaltern" (1988, 205).⁵ Engaging the theoretical vulnerability of both essentialism and anti-essentialism as hegemonizing discourses, she proposes that essentialism be acknowledged as a necessary rearticulation rather than an overall commitment:

Whereas the great custodians of the anti-universal are obliged therefore simply to act in the interest of a great narrative, the narrative of exploitation, while they keep themselves clean by not committing themselves to anything. In fact they are actually run by a great narrative even as they are busy protecting their theoretical purity by repudiating essentialism... [I]t seems to me that anti-revisionary arguments have become fetishized in the context of post-modern capitalism. So from that point of view one can't choose to be a purist as opposed to a revisionist. (1990, 11-13)

Simultaneously, she argues for an anti-essentialist position when it is strategic:

I will have in an undergraduate class, let's say, a young, white male student, politically-correct, who will say: "I am only a

bourgeoise white male, I can't speak [for blacks, women, people in the 'third world,' and so on]...I say to them: 'Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?'...[T]he holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other rather than simply say, 'O.K., sorry, we are just very good white people, therefore we do not speak for the blacks.' That's the kind of breast-beating that is left behind at the threshold and then business goes on as usual. (30, 62, 120)

Arguing that "the debate between essentialism and anti-essentialism is really not the crucial debate," Spivak argues for a mutual interruption (*catachresis*)⁶ between theory and practice as a reminder of "the politics of the open end, or of the politics of great-narrative, depending on what the moment asks for, the reminder of the fact that any really 'loving' political practice must fall a prey to its own critique" (1990, 109-11). Keeping in mind that theory *is* practice, Spivak argues that "[w]e must be conscious of [the importance of this persistent critique] whilst we are engaged in other things: it can't become our central goal just to keep watching our language" (41). On this understanding, theory should work "from within but against the grain" (1988, 205) of the totalizing impulses of narrative that are both inhabited and interrupted by cultural and social accountability.

From the perspectives above, we invited our contributors to respond to the broad critical issue we pitched as transcribed and expanded for our readers in the section that follows; we have emphasized, through references, the concern of contemporary cultural critics with the fact that difference and diversity are recalcitrantly co-opted into sameness, apparently nullifying—but also challenging—efforts toward cultural mobility and relationality.

Thematic and critical references

The theoretical and critical impasse we want to address is the fact that, notwithstanding Jacques Derrida's foregrounding of *différance* as the *deferral of identity* (1982), the English term *difference* has taken on connotations of *identity* instead. As Djelal Kadir points out,

Difference, tautologically enough, operates as identity formation; it confers identity on the differentiated. *Diversity* labors to foster divergence; it deconstructs identity and the identical and thereby foregrounds plurality and alterity, internal and external. Post-melting-pot United States culture and cultural discourse live by difference, even as they proclaim a rhetoric of diversity . . . (2003, 14, qtd. emphasis.)

Moreover, the term *difference* is not alone among theoretical conceptions that are in the course of being flattened into fixity, as if *revealing* closure (and *reveiling* what it dismisses). *Diversity* has also been used to confirm, rather than destabilize, the centrality of received cultural norms. Charles Bernstein calls attention to what can increasingly be seen as

too great a continuum from "diversity" back to New Critical and liberal-democratic concepts of a common readership that often—certainly not always—have the effect of transforming unresolved ideological divisions and antagonisms into packaged tours of the local color of gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, region, nation, class, even historical period: where each group or community or period is expected to come up with—or have appointed for them—representative figures we all can know about. . . . In this context, diversity can be a way of restoring a highly idealized conception of a unified . . . culture that effectively quiets dissent. (1992, 4)

These concerns with the hegemonizing effects of discourses of freedom, democracy and security were echoed more recently (and with much public attention) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who refer to the necessary failure of current attempts to politicize literary and cultural theory and criticism by leveling differences through a euphoric egalitarian version of plurality. What these attempts run up against, as they put it, is the co-optation of difference by the postmodern dynamics of sovereign power:

[T]heorists who advocate a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity in order to challenge the binaries and essentialism of modern sovereignty have been outflanked by the strategies of power. . . the postmodern and postcolonialist strategies that appear to be liberatory [do] not challenge but in fact coincide with and even unwittingly reinforce the new strategies of rule! (2000, 138)

This point had been made much earlier within feminist theory informing the science-fiction writing by Monique Wittig, who warned of difference as the most powerful weapon against itself (1973, 100-01). To give another example, in the context of his critique of the dominant, anemic version of institutionalized postcolonialism, Imre Szeman argues that it is urgent to “understand the dynamism of a capitalism that exercises hegemony by cultivating difference rather than seeking to contain or obliterate it” (2001, 28). This morphing of a wide range of historically specific emancipatory projects into the *telos* of hegemony has had the effect of reducing diversity to categorized difference (each time it “confers identity on the differentiated”), flattening out relationality and crisis under the rubric of ‘conflict resolution’—often merely an excuse for naturalizing and thus reestablishing hierarchy. At the same time, however, it has pressed for new perceptions of conflict and of irresolution itself, out of which new modes of intelligibility can become effective. In this view, difference can be

understood *both* as an ‘always already’ hierarchical episteme, *and* as an ongoing process of change in which neither hierarchy nor its disruption is absolute.⁷

What these reflections suggest is that the very study of the dynamics of hierarchy has been undergoing a significant focus shift. As Judith Butler recalls, critical theories once (mis)taken to lean on the fringe of culture and to produce merely inversions of hierarchy for raising issues on so-called minority themes have become acknowledged as crucial forces in the transformation of our ways of thinking about culture and reality itself—not only according to what is constructed as permissible and even thinkable through normative discourse or its oppositional versions, but also according to what such binary constructs systematically ignore, as well as why, and how. Thus Butler remarks that the very constraints which produce the “violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility” (1993, xii) actually depend on producing, in the same breath, the constant threat of cultural *unintelligibility* in the figure of the repudiated other, in order to legitimize themselves—a threat so arbitrary and so imbricated in its own disruption that all stability is haunted by the anxiety to constantly disavow it (1-55). Butler argues against lamenting the instability and insecurity which this constant deferral entails:

The task will be to consider this threat and disruption not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility. (3)

On this understanding, we have proposed two comprehensive questions as a broad framework for this volume: what issues concerning emancipatory strategies can be effectively raised by textual and cultural criticism and theory at a moment when *différance* and diversity are systematically neutralized by discourses of categorized differ-

ence? In this context, what are some comparative intersections and reading perspectives that may contribute toward making contemporary cultural dynamics intelligible?

Trajectory of the issue

Spivak's essay, here translated under the title "Tradução como cultura",⁸ takes issue with approaches to translation that masquerade "the general violence of culturing," thus precluding "the founding translation between people," which she suggests is "a listening with care and patience, *in the normality of the other*, enough to notice that the other has already *silently* made that effort" (3, 22, my emphases).

The use of "silently" here recalls her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1994 [1988]), which criticizes the "first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves" (87) while warding off—under narratives of nonviolence and benevolence—the ethical crisis which would confront the ongoing economic privilege and collaboration of academics in the international division of labor. Spivak points out that since solutionist and assistentialist scholarship places 'under erasure' the self-perpetuating privilege and hierarchy of the sovereign subject (who speaks) over the other (who remains unheard), the latter is re-produced as an object of investigation rather than a subject of enunciation, a field of investment rather than an investor of history. From this perspective, Spivak's notion of translation (as reading, as language, as life) stresses that it requires the effort of silencing one's own epistemic system in order not to "obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary" (75). Such a notion requires attending to idiomaticities, as she argues here (2000b, 10), wherein translation (as open-endedness, or *catathresis*) resists the subordinating violence of simulated equivalences and resolutions (absorptions) into the generalizing episteme that recalcitrantly establishes the hierarchy of standard over idiom.

Furthermore, the use of “silently” in the phrase above also points to what Peggy Rockman Napaljarri and Lee Cataldi call the “privilege of the loser”: the subaltern is more aware of two cultures than the “winner” (qtd. 2000b, 4). It is crucial to notice that this is not to gloss over the oppressive hierarchy that makes such a privilege possible by silencing the other subject. To transcodify this statement of “the privilege of the loser” into a representation that seems to *repay* the other by positing the value of her (*sic*) episteme in its very repression, thus idealizing or sublimating the effects of her silencing, is the ultimate reification of exclusion, upheld by the permissible (and permissive) narrative of nonviolence. Spivak thus insists that *while subalternized* (not listened to in its own normality; instead, offered ‘benevolence’ from above, thus appropriated, transcodified, into the order of hierarchy), *the subaltern subject cannot speak*; she therefore calls attention to the urgency of “unlearning privilege” by learning that it is loss (1990, 9).

Since “[n]o speech is speech if it is not heard” (2000b, 22), Spivak suggests that, as intellectuals working within the dominant episteme, we must learn to listen to idiomaticity in translation, i.e., to resistant located hybridity—“distinct from the more commonly noticed migrant hybridity” (16)—as difference: “even as the text guards its secret” within “the necessary impossibility of translation” (21-22): “The idiom is singular to the tongue. It will not go over” (3).

Spivak’s essay thus suggests that the constructed opposition between two hegemonic approaches to translation—metropolitan hybridism, on the one hand, and national identitarianism, on the other—elides the very possibility of *resistant located hybridity*. The first of these approaches, metropolitan hybridism, capitalizes on discovering and transcodifying hybrids and assuming an immanent value in hybridity *per se*. Against this exploitative and homogenizing inscription of hybridity in translation—which essentializes and celebrates hybridity, masquerading its own silencing of idiomaticity and, therefore, of the other *as subject*—, Spivak distinguishes the inevitable violence of “a certain kind of translation, of a genealogical scripting, which is *not*

under the control of the deliberative consciousness" (2, my emphasis), and which performs the resistance of (located) idiom to the semiosis of a (metropolitan) generalizing, hegemonizing standard.

National identitarianism, on the other hand, reinscribes capital logic by opposing it—rather, by confirming its very terms while supposing not to. It ignores the irreducible difference Spivak articulates in another context as "the *enabling violation* of the post-colonial situation [that cannot remain] untouched by the vicissitudes of history" (1990, 137, my emphasis). In the context of "Translation as Culture," such irreducibility translates as resistant located hybridity, which can be understood as a reminder of the limits of both emancipatory and constraining narratives of postcoloniality; it is a reminder, for example, that the term *aboriginal* itself refers etymologically to those who had contact with the origin, came from the origin, but are no longer (from) there.⁹ National identitarianism thus ignores the violence of culturing as the constitution of "the subject coming into being" (2000b, 2), who cannot be protected by the fetishization of language:

Sometimes I read and hear that the subaltern can speak in their native languages. I wish I could be as self-assured as the intellectual, literary critic and historian, who assert this in English. No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate.

Spivak thus underlines the necessity of the violence of translation from idiom to standard, *by those who speak from the episteme of the idiom* rather than by voices of 'benevolence' or assistentialism that reinforce hegemonizing cultural hierarchies: "It is only thus that subalternity may painstakingly translate itself into a hegemony that can make use of and exceed all the succor and resistance that we can organize from above" (22). This conception draws on a distinction between rights-based and responsibility-based ethical systems, which here Spivak

extends to a distinction between translation as *transcoding* and translation as *catachresis*.

As transcoding (moving from one semiotic system to another while effacing differentiation), translation conceals its epistemic violence by naturalizing the generality of its criteria of intelligibility and assuming translation as a proxy, as if substituting for the idiom, thus violently absorbed into the episteme of the generalizing language. One tragic example of such occluded violence is the semiosis of multiculturalism, which in its neoliberal version is a euphemism covering up hegemonic bilingualism: “bilateral arrangements between idioms understood as essentially or historically private, on the one side, and English on the other, understood as the semiotic as such. This is the political violence of translation as transcoding” (4), promoting the illusion of English as an all-encompassing instrument for ‘giving voice’ to the other, while occluding the very re-production of the other *as such*. In this generalizing semiosis, the other is unthinkable unless identified, assimilated and fixed, *known* rather than *knowing*, *imagined* rather than *imagining*. The other is thus produced as a field of knowledge *requiring* a standard transcodifier—*English*, which thus passes for a transparent “world language that has no history” (2001, 2), hence no difference: a self-same identity that confirms itself as ubiquitous presence, the teleological and generalizing language that hegemonically “computes” (2000b, 15) in a perpetual today. In short, under this smoke screen of presence, hegemonic bilingualism covers its own effect of obliterating the singular gift of the idiom.

By contrast, catachresis is inside the violence of culturing, the violence of appropriation by language and representation—without pretending nonviolence: on the contrary, it takes into account the uneven relations of concrete materiality within what Spivak calls the “restricted permeability of cultural and linguistic translation”. As culture, translation executes (in both senses) the violence of culturing and transcoding. To ignore this violence by celebrating euphoric globalization is to endorse the “inevitability of unification as *task*” rather than as *contin-*

gency requiring specific strategies for persistent critique (2001, 17, my emphases). This is an endless process, once “the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself” (Derrida 1992, 42): “there is in fact no possibility of adequate representation of any narrative in practice” (Spivak 1990, 28). In this light, the title of Spivak’s essay points to an incessant process of becoming-human through the shuttling translation of violence to consciousness, *and back*: taking up the violence of culturing with the ethical responsibility of keeping the idiomatic episteme alive in translation, even as it can only do so by inhabiting the violence of transcoding—without feigning nonviolence. This is because the shuttle from violence to consciousness cannot be insulated or exempted from violence either; the more dangerous violence is that of feigning resolution (transcoding) of the crisis (catachresis) that the consciousness of violence should bring (translation).

Within the generalizing semiotic of transcoding, translation as catachresis thus interrupts pretensions of correctness, control or nonviolence, and engages language as *self*-differentiation: “This relating to the other as the source of one’s utterance *is* the ethical as being-for” (2000b, 21)—a process disqualified by the dominant framework of language and thought interested in promoting *fear* of lack of control while anxiously disavowing the failure of *security* and the violence of translation.

Far from performing the security of retrieval, the discourses of the gift among which Spivak contextualizes translation can not be understood in terms of give-and-take, subject-and-object, investment-and-return. Rather than being given by one to another, in a linear order of exchange or circulation back into closure, the gift ‘happens’. As a nonobject, it interrupts and exceeds commercial connotations and obligations of exchange: if a gift can be given, it is no longer a gift. Where accountability as responsibility is replaced with accounting, balance and closure, so that the present meets its return as in repayable debt, there is no gift (Derrida 1992). From this perspective, “[a] gift could be possible, there could be a gift only at the instant an effraction in the circle will have

taken place, at the instant all circulation *will have been interrupted and on the condition of this instant*" (9, first emphasis added).

Notice that Spivak also refers to translation as a future anterior, "something that *will have happened* without our knowledge, particularly without our control, the subject coming into being" (2000b, 2, added emphasis). As she puts it in a related context,

The most radical challenge of deconstruction is that notion of thought being a blank part of the text given over to a future that is not just a future present but always a future anterior. It never will be, but always will have been. . . . That is why what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live. (1993, 22)

The notion of the gift, as occurring when the semiosis of exchange simulating equivalence through circulation will have been interrupted, is thus related to what Derrida calls "an effraction in the circle" (1992, 9), a vulnerability opening to the possibility of the "interval," which he articulates in the context of his revisionary reading of Hegel's *Aufhebung*:

We must mark the interval between inversion, which brings low what was high, and the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime. (1972, 42)

If our knowledge and control are necessarily embedded in the inherited, "previous regime" or order of hierarchy, then it is no wonder that a gift could happen only at a moment which is not under our control. In this light, it makes sense to think of translation as an incessant process that succeeds only as it fails: it *happens* only without the control of what we think of as the translator's autonomy to transcoding the original into a so-called return or resolution—the control that conceals its appropriation, generalization (dehistorization) and fossilization of

the 'original' idiom (difference, singularity) through and into the language which is the cultural dominant (sameness, plurality as simulacrum): "Do I believe in fidelity to the original,' you ask. Yes, yes, not because it's possible, but because one must try" (Spivak 2001, 14).

Investing in this errancy whereby language both disrupts and exceeds representation, translation as catachresis interrupts systemic reductions of meaning into the generalizing episteme. Against the possible reduction of such difference to relativism, excusing self-alienation from relationality, let alone commitment, Spivak points out in an interview that the fact that "we are effects within a much larger text / tissue/weave of which ends are not accessible to us is *very different from saying that everything is language*" (1990, 25, my emphasis). Indeed, in the spaces of fragility and vulnerability, where language *frays* in catachresis and effraction, where translation is "not under the control of the *I* that we think of as the subject" (2000b, 1),

Language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. The ways in which rhetoric or figuration disrupt logic themselves point at the possibility of random contingency, beside language, around language. Such a dissemination cannot be under our control. Yet in translation, where meaning hops into the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages, we get perilously close to it. By juggling the disruptive historicity that breaks the surface in not necessarily connected ways, we feel the selvedges of the language-textile give way, fray into *frayages* or facilitations. Although every act of reading or communication is a bit of this risky fraying which scrambles together somehow, our stake in agency keeps the fraying down to a minimum except in the communication and reading of and in love. (What is the place of "love" in the ethical?) (2000a [1993], 398)

As “a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries,” translation as catachresis is clearly not a resolutionist program, but an ethical practice. As Spivak conveys in this volume’s opening essay, it is the interminable attempt to repay what cannot be repaid, and should not be thought of as being repayable: the gift of birth and idiom, the mother-debt which is “the placeholder for the mother tongue” (15). This project is endless, a task of at once unavoidable and impossible reparation, requiring persistent attention to the ways privilege at once reestablishes and loses itself—constituting the subject in ethical responsibility, even as “the ethical task is never quite performed” (21). This dynamics is the focus of the essays that follow.

Laura Lomas’s essay, “Beyond ‘Fixed’ and ‘Mixed’ Racial Paradigms: the Discursive Production of the Hispanic and the 2000 U.S. Census,” lays out the covert dynamics that allows demographic discourse to manage and adjust its own statutory criteria on race and ethnicity in order to accommodate hegemonic purposes, thus reestablishing privilege. For Lomas, the official text feeds into the euphoric narrative of the emancipation of ‘minority’ populations only to concoct a new category of difference, ‘Hispanic,’ so as to deflect attention from what haunts the xenophobic split of the official U.S. national psyche: the fact that Latinos/as (mostly African and Amerindian descendents), as a ‘minority,’ are actually in the process of becoming the demographic *majority* of the U.S. by the year 2050. Lomas argues that, in order to cover up the actual quantitative minoritization of “the group that currently reaps the wages of whiteness” (67), the 2000 U.S. Census manipulates not only its statistical data but also its official regulatory matrix—and even the racial system itself.

Insofar as it co-opts Latino/as into the white-population count by manipulating definitions of race and ethnicity through a new category based on “Hispanic origin—a treatment not applicable to any other racial or ethnic group” (67), U.S. Census 2000 also “reinforces a wedge between the two groups who would constitute a new majority of the historically oppressed by practices of white racism” (86). This hegemonizing move is made only more historically oppressive by the

fact that the immigration of 'Hispanics' to the U.S. took place as one of the various openings brought about in the 1960s once the African-American Civil Rights movement had led the way. What Lomas calls "the discursive production of the Hispanic" is thus analyzed in the light of an identification that is invented while bringing into competition, thus politically neutralizing, those so-called minorities who have largely sustained Euro-American hegemony for centuries against the demise of its own self-perpetuating ideology—a demise metaphorized as "the end of whiteness," of course with dire consequences for those produced as 'non-whites.'

This analysis of the 2000 U.S. Census's racist identity politics is followed by readings of Chicano performer Gómez-Peña's *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems and Loqueras for the End of the Century* (1996) and Native Canadian director/actress Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1991) which, Lomas argues, parody the neoliberal version of the 'Hispanic.' In doing so, she adds, they bring into evidence what is left out of the subtractive logic of polarity (between paradigms of racial purity, on the one hand, and of multiracialism, on the other) along a single axis consolidating white supremacy. This acute critique of right-wing discourses of racial, sexual, and cultural purity in the U.S., that posit bilingualism and immigrant inflows as *contaminating* 'the American dream,' leads to the powerful question that guides Lomas's rewarding discussion of these texts: "How do Latino/a artists Gómez-Peña and Mojica distinctly criticize Euro-American coloniality and racism without depending upon an essentialist, binary definition of racial opposition?"

In his essay "Disability as Diversity: a Difference with a Difference," G. Thomas Couser suggests that the discourse of disability epitomizes the ways biopower sustains hegemony as itself a victim under constant threat by the seemingly external force of difference. In the light of such discourses of security which rely on constructs of difference as threat, the production of national identity analyzed in Lomas's aforementioned essay can clearly be seen as a legacy of the early twentieth-century eugenics movement—as Couser puts it, "climactically, in

Nazi Germany" (97)—, which established racial and physical difference as a matter to be identified nationally so as to legitimize hegemonic norms requiring discourses of pathologization to assume that the 'problem' is the person with disabilities rather than "the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person" (Davis 1997, 9).

For Couser, "both high and popular culture are saturated with images of disability" in ways that naturalize the discriminatory gaze on minorities as spectacles inviting inspection and fascination (99). In this sense, visibility is used reductively to manufacture rather than expose and thus undermine minoritization. Furthermore, Couser argues that disability serves as a foundational discourse or matrix on which other minorities are built as such, in a clear allusion to exclusionary representations of the 'disabled'.¹⁰ As "physical and mental impairments often underpin constructions of gender, race, and ethnicity" differences (97), disability is often used as a reactionary lever over which other minorities lift themselves by positing their difference from the disabled, apparently resisting exclusionary discourses—while actually endorsing the implicit assumption that disability justifies discrimination (34).

Recalling that "disability constitutes the one minority anyone can join, [so] it may be the form of diversity that generates the most anxiety and discomfort in others" (101), Couser describes the two related projects currently being advanced in the expanding field of Disability Studies: one, to bring visibility to the perspectives of individuals minoritized by discriminatory representational practices—a population larger than that of African-Americans or Latinos in the U.S. (Davis 2); the other, to demystify received truths on the intrinsic relations between culture, the body, and (bio)power, by exposing and reconstructing the ways in which disability is socially and culturally constituted.¹¹ That these changes are urgent is evidenced in the essay by a survey of representations of the disabled in linguistic metaphors, literary and filmic texts, and medical and scientific discourses.

Couser also considers the dynamics of cultural fixity/mobility embedded in autobiographical literature on disability, which, he argues, “stands in a unique relation to life narrative” since “deviations from bodily norms often provoke a demand for explanatory narrative in everyday life.” On the one hand, he calls attention to the fact that

[w]hereas the unmarked case—the ‘normal’ body—can pass without narration, the marked case—the scar, the limp, the missing limb or the obvious prosthesis—calls for a story” (*), often in ways expected to “relieve their auditors’ discomfort . . . The elicited narrative is expected to conform to, and thus confirm, a cultural script. (106 - 07)

But cultural constraint is not conclusive, Couser argues: such writings also perform cultural mobility in their “form of autoethnography, as Mary Louise Pratt has defined it: ‘instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms’ (7)” (106). To the extent that engaging with those terms also reproduces them, such writing keeps in irreducible tension the inextricable duality of their representation—as Couser puts it, “a political as well as a mimetic act” (106).

Roland Walter’s essay, “The Poetics and Politics of Identity at the Crossroads of Cultural Difference and Diversity” also focuses on the critical project to read identity, difference and diversity as irreducible sites of relational tension. Considering the global context of negotiations between what Walter Mignolo theorized as “local histories” and “global designs,” Walter argues for conceptions of identity-as-process and of diversity-as-relationality:

[I]dentity and culture imply mutually fractured differences. This, I contend, is the basis on which to think cultural alterity in a global context. Cultural comprehension is not located in melting-pot notions of *cultural synthesis*, which gloss over

the internal heterogeneity of its various parts for the sake of national consensus, and *cultural plurality* that appropriate and distort cultural difference for the sake of multiculturalism. Rather, it can be achieved through the negotiation of cultural contradictions, antagonisms, and similarities within, between, and across its heterogeneous elements. (120)

Walter takes issue, then, with the facile analogy that shifts the dichotomy sameness/difference to that of unity/plurality—a move that effectively reduces plurality, multiculturalism and diversity to the multiplication of sameness instead. Thus refusing multiculturalism as a proliferation of identitarian fixity and stability, he argues that the Foucaultian subject position, constrained by networks of power and ideology, is vulnerable to the interplay of “residual” and “emergent” cultural elements, forces and practices (Williams) that intersect with overlapping and asymmetrical *layers* of identity positions. As a shuttling process, identity “moves on shifting grounds between temporarily rooted social locations,” thus “belonging not ‘without identity’ (Grossberg 1996, 103), but within, between and across multiple identifications . . . What we have to transcend, then, is not difference per se, but the notion of difference as unsurpassable separation and exclusion” (119)—and by extension, I might add, *identity* as the *identical* rather than as changing historical trajectory.

Without losing sight of the ways difference is often used to block constructive interactions so as to re-cover hegemonic normalcy, Walter analyzes various textual moments in which novels by Gisèle Pineau, Dionne Brand, T. C. Boyle, Conceição Evaristo, Maryse Condé and Alejo Carpentier negotiate difference in struggles for change within hierarchical schemes of congealing power.

Foregrounding the need to examine negotiations of difference according to the specific contexts in which it is discursively produced, David Williams Foster’s “Homophobia in Intercultural Context” demonstrates some of the ways homophobia varies in different Hispanic contexts. Foster admittedly uses the term “homosexual,” despite its

major drawbacks as an essentialized identity assigned by medical-legal discourse, as an indispensable concession enabling him, in exchange, to renegotiate the identification of individuals discriminated *as such*. This is a case of strategic essentialism allowing Foster to scrutinize “homophobia” instead, for it “continues repeatedly to be used as though it were an unanalyzed and unanalyzable concept” (137).

In his analysis of Cuban directors’ Néstor Alemendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal’s film *Conducta impropia* (1984), Foster discusses the semiosis that appropriates homosexuality as the master trope for producing widespread public rejection of social dissidence:

One of the terrible ironies of modern history is that for the left as much as for the right, homosexuality has marked the irretrievably damning: to be homosexual was to be in direct defiance of the Christian heteronormative patriarchy.

Drawing on Foucault’s notion of the subject as an effect of discourse, Foster’s essay lays out the dynamics by which homophobia is a constitutive element allowing for the production of the “compulsive” heterosexist-homophobic standard (Foster is here playing and expanding on Adrienne Rich’s famous concept of “compulsory heterosexuality”). This dynamic, he argues, effectively obliterates all events that hold the power to demystify and thus to threaten the naturalizing girders of hierarchy and hegemony.

Foster discusses two novels by U.S. Chicano Michael Nava, as case studies in the production of the normative, coherent subject by means of producing homosexuality as an incoherent social text, effectively covering up and at the same time intensifying homophobia as internalized surveillance. In this context, he argues that

[h]omoerotic desire as an incoherent script serves as an integral part of the detective stories Nava writes, in the sense that the narratives of criminal violence that Rios needs to solve are crisscrossed by a homophobia that, by insisting on

how such desire makes no sense at all, only impedes the solution of what happened.

These are case studies, furthermore, of how the traditionally homophobic discourse of criminality preemptively feeds into the fear of unintelligibility to ensure the affirmative myth of natural heterosexuality. Thus homophobia provides normativity with the negative image on which it depends, through *discipline and punishment*, to reaffirm its own coherence.¹² It is by constitutive polarity, therefore, that homosexuality gets produced as an “internally contradictory and, therefore, *non-occurring* category” (143, my emphasis). On this note, Foster discusses Peruvian filmmaker Francisco J. Lombardi’s *No se lo digas a nadie* (1998) in the light of “the powerful force of hypocrisy that works in appallingly efficient tandem with homophobia, to ensure that what is *possible* both defies social truth and permits that which is disallowed” (149).

On this note, what Walter Lippman dubbed “the manufacturing of consent” (1921) is among the issues examined by Sônia Torres’s essay, “Manufaturando dissidência: performance e política em *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*.” Torres analyzes the theatrical performance and playtext *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*, by Canadian actors Guillermo Verdecchia and Daniel Brooks, based on Chomsky’s lectures on U.S. military interventions, state terrorism, and pro-state ideology in the media and their very structural apparatus.

Torres focuses not only on the play as performance, but also on the performance itself as a striking critique of the intricate ways hegemonic ideology is fabricated through its wholesale, uncritical absorption of whatever comes from the media. For example, the performance takes the audience to task in its complicitous conformity with the media’s critical standards and with their power to disqualify a play on the sheer aestheticist grounds that it does not meet formal expectations. Torres argues that in confronting the audience this way, the play blurs conventional boundaries between aesthetics and politics, denouncing theater itself to be a cultural “institution just as financially bribable as

politics, and just as ideologically constrained by what Chomski, following Lippman, calls “the manufacturing of consent” (168 na).

Torres argues further that *The Chomsky Letters* calls on Canadians to debunk “the myth allowing them to identify themselves as a politically- and environmentally-correct people who privilege diversity, multiculturalism and equality” (163)¹³: Indeed, the playtext foregrounds the acknowledgment that in various parts of Toronto queers, gays, lesbians, blacks and women still face daily harrassment, discrimination, and the threat of physical violence. For Torres, this confrontation with Canada’s self-image is further accomplished as the play lays out historical events that challenge the peaceful character of Canada’s national image, demonstrating the country’s compliance with U.S. military interventionism instead. What *The Chomsky Letters* demands, in Torres’s view, is that the rampant “manufacturing of consent” be understood as a challenge: audiences must learn “to decode the ideology-drenched information flows that flatten out diversity under narcotic passivity” (166).

Also concerned with decoding toward overwriting political discourses, Liane Schneider’s “A representação e os espaços de releitura das diferenças” argues for re-reading history from the perspective of local participation in the overlapping knowledges that have shaped both the overt and covert historical trajectory of culture throughout changing times—as illustrated remarkably by the epigraph-photograph with which her essay begins.

From this revisionist historical perspective, Schneider inquires how Brazilian postcoloniality itself is to be revisited from a current perspective that rejects former manicheistic views of sociocultural inequality as belonging to the southern hemisphere alone or outside the so-called ‘first world.’ Such a revisionist perspective, she suggests, must neither ignore nor trivialize the undeniable geographical asymmetries that hold their indelible historical marks and legacies in human interactions today. In this light, she reminds us:

Among the harshest consequences of colonialism for those who suffered imperialist intrusions and invasions in the past was the fact that the most diverse communities, sharing different historical traditions, were juxtaposed and pretensely interpreted according to one single theory and one single economic ideal, the aim of which was to establish Europe's hegemony over its "others" . . . A perspective that averts this pretense homogeneity reveals that, on the contrary, among the most striking traits of postcolonial cultures is precisely the attempt to grasp and to understand the diverse shocks, contradictions, crises and conjunctures that have taken place concerning myths, versions of history and values that are inevitably linked to the advent of colonialism. (175, my translation)

Keeping in mind that diversity and hybridity already existed long before the postcolonial moment, Schneider argues that from its very inception postcolonial theory has stressed the impossibility to formulate its terms under a univocal perspective or a unifying alliance among diverse political agendas. Indeed, "it is precisely the notion of a 'fixed' alterity, pinning down a subject who can be easily defined and classified, that postcolonial discourse has cogently refuted throughout the years" (176, *idem*).

Discussing arguments put forth by Spivak, Bellei and Fonseca dos Santos, Schneider addresses the present-day situation of "postcolonialism as an institution" in Brazil—and the still pressing dilemma concerning the inevitable incongruity of conducting postcolonial studies in English, the language of the expansionist hubs of corporate power worldwide. Schneider argues that such linguistic positions are no longer static. Perhaps, she suggests, "we will have to draw on our Iberian cultural legacies from the colonial period as well as on those we have absorbed from the Anglo-Saxon world if we are to ground ourselves in the terrain of contemporary postcolonial theory and criticism without allowing our differences to be fetishized" (185, *idem*).

On a related dilemma, I argue in “Neither Sword Nor Pen: Phallacious Impotence in *Midnight’s Children*” that Salman Rushdie’s novel explores the very impossibility of fulfilling an emancipatory project that inevitably bears, but is irreducible to, the hegemonizing terms of phallogocentric discourse. In the context of a national identity defined by the colonizer nation, on the one hand, and as such rejected by India’s anticolonial movement resisting subordination, on the other, it is no wonder that *Midnight’s Children* enacts a distrust of its own narrative of ‘emancipation’—by definition, a process embedded within hegemonic conceptions of time, identity, and resolution. It elaborates, therefore, on the necessary ambivalence of a narrative which must both resist and inhabit its self-perpetuating paradigms.

In this context, resolution can only be effected by reductionist means: trapped in its amnesia, the narrative of coherence projects its conflicts into the proliferating figure (diversity) of difference. By establishing various points of contrast, diversity re-centers authorial stability as a reference point, a site of unchanging intelligibility that stands in for reality. Resolution thus emerges as a fetish, disavowing irreducible reality and replacing it with the fantasy and anxiety of the self to represent a univocal reality in its own image—even if by contrast, as exotic and abject alterity.

The question thus becomes: how can this narrative of sameness appear unaffected by the difference it is so anxious to subtract? How can its rhetorics be so easily bought? What sustains such an *authoritarian* manipulation of readerly reality? My suggestion is that what Sinai calls the “biceps and triceps” without which his narrative would not exist is a pervasive discourse of gender hierarchy that naturalizes hierarchy itself. Thus the narrator’s admittedly hyperbolic authorial project to carry the reader from conflict to resolution and ultimately to the reinstallation of patriarchal hierarchy becomes couched in a circular logic, all the while taking for granted authorial control as the sheer need to *author-ize* what may thus become an *authoritative* fiction. In this sense, far from reflecting any immanent, mimetic, natural or transcendental meaning, narrative irresolution in this novel can be read as

a transformational resource expanding the reader's perception of the enabling failure of representational stasis.

Final remarks

These essays suggest that an awareness of the provisionality of meaning can alter the ways we see not just texts that posit knowledge conducive to finalization and resolution, but also texts that posit difference. Such an awareness is central to an understanding of culture's potentiality for change within the historical contexts of language and knowledge, as has been argued by Derrida and others: it is precisely because intelligibility is monitored by the knowledge-interests of the privileged present that its inertia within culture is vulnerable to the mobility it systematically disavows. That critical concepts and arguments cannot be identically repeated, or strait-jacketed into the original functions intended for them, opens opportunities for expanding perceptions of cultural possibilities and meanings in the making. This precisely one of the tasks of criticism: to discern "how forms are troped and what rhetorical and political functions they perform in any given instance at a particular time" (Blasing 1995, 17).

In this sense, the theoretical vulnerability which this issue seeks to address is itself performative of the constitution of *culture* "not [as] the expression of random motion but of . . . cultural exchange . . . of social energies and practices" (Greenblatt 1995, 229-30). The relevance of this notion of mobility for approaching cultural texts is highlighted by Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, who remind us that "any reading must be made *from* a particular position, but is not *reducible* to that position"; writing on the dynamics by which culture both conditions and activates meanings, they claim

in all texts a potential for new linkages to be made and thus for new political meanings to be constructed. Rather than attempting to derive the text's significance from the moment

[and place] of its production, this politicized intertextuality emphasizes the present use to which texts can now be put. (1985, 193)

Having engaged theoretical vulnerability for decades now, such fields as cultural studies as well as poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial criticism are in the enabling process of marking their differences from their institutionalized domains, marking the limits of their own reified epistemic positions. This reveals an understanding that the perception of difference is *not to be dismissed, but expanded*—a relevant point to make, now that the timely ‘de-doxification’ of identity politics may be doxifying, wholesale, the well-accommodated value patterns that have nihilistically sidestepped emergent possibilities of meaning towards relationality.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to Sérgio Bellei, Gláucia Gonçalves and Laura Lomas for their comments on an earlier draft of this introductory essay.
- 2 I refer to Stephen Greenblatt’s concept of culture as a term which “gestures toward what *appear* [my emphasis] to be opposite things: *constraint* and *mobility*” (1995, 225). I have italicized *appear* to emphasize the overlapping force that is often subtracted from the opposition between cultural constraint and mobility.
- 3 For Laura Mulvey, “Fetishism, broadly speaking, involves the attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomous powers to a manifestly ‘man’-derived object. It is, therefore, dependent on the ability to disavow what is known and replace it with belief and the suspension of disbelief. On the other hand, the fetish is always haunted by the fragility of the mechanisms that sustain it” (1996, 7-8). To the extent that such a hold or reduction depends on the structural stasis of hierarchy for its sustenance, fetishization is a prime asset for hegemonic discourse interested in naturalizing hierarchy.
- 4 *Agency* is here understood as “a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (Butler 1993, 15).

- 5 Spivak refers to *metalepsis* (the substitution of an effect for a cause) as an example of the limits of causal thinking evidenced by post-structuralist critique (1990, 23).
- 6 “[Catachresis: ‘Improper use of words, application of a term to a thing which it does not properly denote, abuse or perversion of a trope or metaphor’ (OED). /Spivak’s/ usage: a metaphor without an adequate literal referent, in the last instance a model for all metaphors, all names]” (qtd. Spivak 1990, 154).
- 7 This ongoing shift is what Derrida calls a *trembling* of movements that “do not destroy structures from the outside. [Movements which] are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it” (1976, 24).
- 8 Quotations are from the original, “Translation as Culture” (2000b).
- 9 Spivak contrasts her notion of the *abject* against Julia Kristeva’s in an interview, pointing out that “for me, the question of the abject is very closely tied to the question of being *ab*-original, rather than a reinscription of the object, it is a question of the reinscription of the subject” (1990, 10).
- 10 Women, for example, are theorized by Freud, Lacan and others as ‘lack’ (Mitchell and Rose 1982, 48-50).
- 11 Lennard Davis reminds us that “American Sign Language was listed in the [MLA] data base as an ‘invented language’ along with the language of the Lingons of *Star Trek*. Thanks to efforts of activists, this categorization will no longer be the case and American Sign Language will be listed as a legitimate language” (1997, 7)—bringing into view, as well, its literary, historical, scientific and artistic texts. If visibility is used in other contexts, as mentioned above, to exoticize difference, here it clearly undermines minoritization.
- 12 As in a photograph, this negative image is often celebrated as if positively, as the exotic. In this context of what Greenblatt calls “improvization” in the adjustment between the forces of cultural mobility and constraint,

[t]he most disciplinary techniques practiced against those who stray beyond the limits of a given culture are probably not the spectacular punishments reserved for serious offenders—exile, imprisonment in an insane asylum, penal servitude, or execution—but seemingly innocuous responses: a

condescending smile, laughter poised between the genial and the sarcastic, a small dose of indulgent pity laced with contempt, cool silence. And we should add that a culture's boundaries are enforced more positively as well: through the system of rewards that range again from the spectacular (grand public honors, glittering prizes) to the apparently modest (a gaze of admiration, a respectful nod, a few words of gratitude. (225-26)

This view draws on Foucault's notion of the growing historical sophistication of cultural control and biopower through internalized surveillance, as in his *Discipline and Punish* (1977 [1975]).

13 Translations are mine.

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