SPECIAL ISSUE

Migration, Transnationalism and the Cultural Logic of Global Identity

GUEST EDITOR

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American, British and Canadian Studies, the Journal of the Academic Anglophone Society of Romania, appears biannually at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. It is a peer-reviewed journal that sets out to explore the intersections of culture, technology and the human sciences in the age of electronic information. It publishes work by scholars of any nationality on Anglophone Studies, Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Theory, Social and Political Science, Anthropology, Area Studies, Multimedia and Digital Arts and related subjects. Articles addressing influential crosscurrents in current academic thinking are particularly welcome. ABC Studies also publishes book reviews and review essays, conference reports, notes and comments.

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**Notes on Contributors**

**Call for Papers**
Many of us in the ‘west’, academics in particular, have the luxury of living in relative peace and security, shielded geographically from the turbulence, violence and poverty of many nations to the east. Few of us can ignore the inhospitable political status of Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea and other countries whose wars, leadership and laws have led to the greatest movement of peoples since World War Two. Millions of people have made and continue to make the perilous journey west, in the hope of finding peace and prosperity, a place to raise families and form new communities. Community, what Zygmunt Bauman terms “the last relic of the old-time utopias of the good society” (Liquid Modernity, 92), is in this sense an imagined new home in the west; a shelter in a foreign place.

The responses to this phenomenon are varied and complex; ongoing changes in the international political order make this an unstable terrain upon which to theorise. Yet, this mass migration impacts nations, communities, economies, and policies with wide-ranging consequences. Therefore we must attempt to make sense of the current wave of migration in an interdisciplinary and analytical mind-set. American studies and British studies scholars have theorised what it is that the west and western culture is thought to offer. Generally, there is a supposed heritage of social and ethical norms, religious and political systems with favourable moral traditions, customs and ethics which would ostensibly welcome newcomers and offer them both freedoms of thought, belief and movement as well as economic opportunities. The traditions of rationalism, scholasticism, humanism, and enlightenment purport to reflect a kind and thoughtful place of mutual respect and recognitions.

Migration has been a feature of human history from the earliest times; one might even say since the Homo sapiens left Africa 100,000 years ago.
Yet the contemporary patterns of migration are inextricably linked to ideologies of places. The 'west' attracts several types of immigration at present, such as economic migrants and political refugees, thus complicating national and international policymaking. Thus, migration is highly politicized and affects domestic and international politics, regional relationships and security policies. Among the analytical approaches, the economic one is useful in illustrating that there are both push and pull factors. 'Push' factors include a lack of economic opportunities, political or religious repression and demographic factors, and 'pull' factors include the demand for labour, economic opportunities, political or religious freedoms. Both macrostructures and microstructures have a part in how mass immigration plays out in the west. Macrostructures: made up of global markets, relationships among states, policies and laws, interact with microstructures: the internal networks created by immigrants, the relationships and communities they form, their help and information centres in host countries.

Two issues come to the fore of current analytic investigation: the regulation of international migration and the impact that the resultant ethnic diversity has on the culture of the destination countries. Immigration and the consequent ethnic diversity represent a serious challenge to national identity, in some sense creating a people without common ethnic origins. When this is coupled with a strong sense of national pride in the destination country, serious antagonism can be seen to occur. Transnationalism, as a field of study, examines the communities that result from the linkages being established between societies as a result of migration. This approach has much to offer as it helps to illustrate the way in which migrants often have multiple identities rather than a static national/ non-national identity.

The Current Crisis

The EU’s external border force, Frontex, monitors the numbers arriving at Europe’s borders. In 2015 the figure crossing into Europe was more than
According to the IOM, more than 3,770 migrants were reported to have died trying to cross the Mediterranean in 2015. In that year, the deadliest month for migrants was April, which saw a boat carrying about 800 people capsize in the sea off Libya. Overcrowding is thought to have been one of the reasons for the disaster. As academics, it is imperative that we reflect on this crisis as humanitarians and consider the appalling degradation and despair which compels people and families in such large numbers to make these dangerous journeys. In “From Pilgrim to Tourist,” Bauman wrote of the nature of the necessary journey, the pilgrimage which is not a choice:

One can reflect on the road past and see it as progress towards, an advance, a coming closer to; one can make the distinction between ‘behind’ and ‘ahead’ and plot the ‘road ahead’ as a succession of footprints yet to pockmark the land without features. Destination, the set purpose of life’s pilgrimage, gives form to the formless, makes a whole out of the fragmentary, lends continuity to the episodic. (22)

As these migrants and refugees continue to attempt to cross into Europe, mostly by sea, a European crisis has been sparked as countries struggle to cope with such large numbers, and divisions in the EU continue to flare up over how to efficiently manage the resettlement. Tensions in the EU have been rising because of the burden faced by some countries; the UK
has seen a rise in far-right politics espousing a ‘true Britain’ unsullied by immigrants.

The UK has opted out of any plans for a quota system but, according to Home Office figures, 1,000 Syrian refugees were resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Relocation scheme in 2015. Former Prime Minister David Cameron said the UK would accept up to 20,000 refugees from Syria over the next five years (Europe migrant crisis). However, the defeat of his party in the Brexit vote and his subsequent retirement from politics leaves this very much in doubt.

The rapid and unprecedented changes being experienced by Europe as migrants and refugees imprint Europe with a new identity opens up questions of European identity. The backlash seen in many European countries who openly reject migrants sparks fears of a right-wing takeover. Leonidas Donskis foresaw Europe’s problems as the phenomena of fear of modernization, as mass migration would cause an “outbreak of moral panic and over-reaction” (in Bauman and Donskis 95).

Fear speaks the language of uncertainty, unsafety and insecurity, which our epoch provides in large quantities and even in abundance. The proliferation of conspiracy theories and vigorous, albeit simplistic, approaches to the European union reminds us of how difficult or even unbearable our life can be in constant doubt and uncertainty. (Donskis in Bauman and Donskis 96)

And yet, Britain attracts hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees; their numbers growing even as the country’s new Prime Minister assembles a squad of experts to orchestrate the official departure of the UK from the European Union. Focussing on salvaging access to the ‘free market’, the UK government so far refuses to confirm the status of the millions of EU citizens and the hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants currently in the country. The Office of National Statistics state that 4.9 million people in the UK are non-British citizens. But what attracts
these people? Current conditions in the Calais immigrant camp known as “the jungle” illustrate the severity with which Britain protects its borders from unwanted migrants. To use the Levi-Strauss term, Britain appears to enact an “anthropoemic” strategy, viewing potential immigrants as incurably alien to British values, beliefs and identity, barring them from entry without any sense of responsibility. The large numbers reaching Europe are seen to be the single biggest cause of Britain recently deciding to leave the European Union.

Writers, philosophers and academics speak of the crisis of liberalism in Europe: the counter-liberalism that sees xenophobia and racism on the increase, the rise in far-right parties and isolationist rhetoric, while politicians seek to publicise themselves on anti-immigration soapboxes in order to gain re-election. The United Kingdom voted with a majority of 52% to leave the European Union on June 23rd, 2016. The political campaign leading to this decision was notable for its anti-European rhetoric, couched in the language of fear. British flags hang from windows as a mark of anti-European sentiment, political parties fail to reach any consensus over how to manage the exit from the EU and the new Prime Minister Teresa May faces continual attack over the mismanagement of the migrant crisis. Writing before the current crisis, Arjun Appadurai acknowledges the currencies of fear and distrust that characterise the contexts of rapid migration and refugee movement:

The speed and intensity with which both material and ideological elements now circulate across national boundaries have created a new order of uncertainty in social life...how many of “them” are now among us?...these various forms of uncertainty create intolerable anxiety about the relationship of many individuals to state-provided goods – ranging from housing and health to safety and sanitation. (5-6)

As Britain grew to doubt the illusion of sovereignty, seeing it as ceded to the EU, an essential element of ‘Britishness’ was seen to be lost, and this
was exacerbated by massive inward migration. Many of the discourses which abounded prior to the Brexit referendum centred on livelihood, security, pressure on health-care services and ‘difference’. To use Appadurai’s term, the “predatory narcissism” of the right-wing British populist politicians rendered foolish the millions of migrants who look to the west as a beacon of hope. Ethnic and religious difference has been seized as a defining factor in personhood, in rights and in national worthiness. And yet, these are not new concerns, nor are they limited to Britain as the papers in this edition attest. Migration has been a concern of nations and states since time immemorial and this is just one example of a time and place confronted by and concerned with mass migration toward economically preferential states.

This edition seeks to excavate some of these concerns and themes which circulate through cultural production in contemporary times. From Britain to Ireland and the USA, migration in its many guises catches the imagination as both gain and loss, a letting-go and a catching-hold, seeking to rebuild communities in strange places and to re-make selves in foreign contexts.

This special issue of American, British and Canadian Studies does not purport to offer any answers, nor any solutions. It seeks instead to contribute to the debate and engender new avenues of exploration so that we may adequately address this new social crisis. Reflecting on global mobility and cultural diaspora, on spaces, borders and transnationalism, it examines the European identity as it is imagined and mediated.

Contributions

The mediatisation of the current migrant crisis engenders much debate among media scholars. Ksenia Nikitina reflects on the current migration crisis as it exists not only in ‘real’ European countries, but in the information field as well. Media is responsible for the manner in which people from all over the world perceive the situation and so the media texts produced have both an agenda and a responsibility. This paper is devoted to the study of speech manipulation technologies in US political media discourse, examining a
number of web-based articles. An axiological good/bad dichotomy is exposed via a speech-manipulation analysis, which illustrates the non-neutral language of rapportage in contemporary media.

The global flow which operates in tandem with migration has profound consequences for national identities. Ching-huan Lin makes the valuable point that no single region in Europe is ‘pure’ and all have been at some time affected by immigration. This article explores the book _A Distant Shore_ which focuses on the immigration of refugees to modern England in the late 1990s. By placing his protagonists within the wider context of the black (African-Caribbean) diaspora, the author has offered transnational perspectives on European migration and belonging that reflect, in turn, on what it means to be European at different stages of the continent’s past. The arrivals of black migrants via various routes and at various times also reflect the successive changes in Europe’s geopolitical map and its tight connection with the peripheral zones. The fluidity of Europe’s borders, sense of identity and claims to space and certainty are exposed in this analysis, which offers valuable insights into the current predicament and our attempts to theorize it in concrete terms.

Art, as a cultural product, has much to add to discussions about identity and culture at any given time and place. Janna Houwen carefully examines empathy and benevolence by looking at two intermedial installations that address the experiences of people on the run from war or poverty, yet overtly hinder and problematize the viewer’s identification with the depicted refugees. Friday Table (2013) by art collective Foundland, and Isaac Julien’s video installation Ten Thousand Waves (2010) differ from the many contemporary discourses dealing with the migrant crisis, questioning the assumption of empathy’s benevolence. Taking theoretical texts concerning the relation between empathy, politics and the (lens-based) representation of refugees by for instance Slavoj Žižek (2016) and Jill Bennett (2005) as a starting point, Houwen reads Friday Table and Ten Thousand Waves as reflections on the pitfalls as well as the critical political possibilities of empathy. She contends that both texts feature intermediality as a system of
Both Friday Table and Ten Thousand Waves combine lens-based media (photography, video and film) with non-lens-based forms (drawings, graphs and calligraphy) and Houwen illustrates how this is crucial in the way that the artworks reflect on the complex nature of the relationship between spectators and depicted refugees.

Dana Radler makes a significant contribution to the field with her exploration of John McGahern’s fiction. Memory, trauma, exile and conflict are examined via an investigation McGahern’s work, looking at the personal memories and the question of what belonging and identity represent for the Irish. Radler shows the links between immigration and memory studies, psychology and psychoanalysis. These links are useful in clarifying how the immigrant can both love and hate his new territory. This exploration of transnationalism, as it is expressed through narrative fiction, looks at departure followed by return and the conflicting emotions of being a returning migrant. Radler exposes McGahern’s writing as a blend of memories and imagination, and so does examining the pervasive power of ideologies which the migrant ingests abroad. This makes a robust contribution to the debate about identity and culture, the psychological residues of our economic choices in the light of ‘hard times’, and goes some way to explore the felt dimension of exile.

Transnationalism is a popular theme in many contemporary narratives; evoking many of the concerns and considerations which preoccupy today’s post-migration citizens. Elena Stoican provides an interesting reflection on transmigrant cultural identities as illustrated in the works of two contemporary South Asian American and Romanian American authors, Jhumpa Lahiri and Aura Imbărăuş. This article offers useful examples of transnationalism and its often complex nature, as characters jostle with both their new and old cultural identities. The comparison involves Gogol, a South Asian American character, and Aura, the author of the memoir Out of the Transylvania Night. Although Gogol is a fictional character and Aura is an actual transmigrant, their comparative assessment relies on the assumption that both narratives are inspired by the authors’
background of relocation. Despite their different cultural origins, both authors share thematic aspects related to the dynamics of cultural identity in the context of migration. This article contributes to the field of analysis by its lucid comparative analysis, which foregrounds intersections between different experiences of cultural negotiation in the context of displacement. Born and raised in America, Gogol is challenged by his cultural multiplicity and he strives to suppress elements of his Indian identity. Aura Imbăruş offers the example of a first generation Romanian transmigrant, who undergoes voluntary relocation to the United States. Both characters come to reassess the culture and value systems which they have ostensibly left behind, and finally adopt a hybridity which accommodates both the emigrant and immigrant. This article thus offers a critical lens with which to assess personhood and identity in the complex era of migration.

Jin Lee’s research offers a unique perspective on current migrancy issues by looking at tensions between identity and difference through a reading of Arthur Conan Doyle’s novella *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. Lee suggests that the story illustrates some of the tensions inherent in the notion of hospitality and invokes the Derridean notion of hospitality, in which identity and difference constitute each other. In examining the concept of global identity, Lee illustrates how this novella features global trade in miniature, and so can reveal patterns which are still prescient today, such as Britain’s dependence on the Other.

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Works Cited


Migration, Transnationalism and 
the Cultural Logic of Global Identity
The Migration Crisis as It Seems:
Speech Manipulation Technology in US Internet Media

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Abstract
The following paper is devoted to the study of speech manipulation technologies in US political media discourse. A number of web-based articles have been taken under consideration for this study. They demonstrate the problem arising from the refugee flow in Europe and create a special “image” of the complicated European situation. It is helpful to see how the situation appears in the Internet media since this type of mass communication is most influential these days. While considering a large amount of media texts, a special speech manipulation technology has been revealed. This phenomenon demonstrates a distinct structure and close interrelations of purposefully selected elements. Going through a number of stages we can find out the technology of speech manipulation – a system of using the aggregate of speech manipulation instruments in order to purposefully guide the reality perception of the mass audience. The external level of the texts enables us to take a penetrating look at the internal intentions. This knowledge will help us not to confuse the migration crisis as it is and the migration crisis as it seems.

Keywords: speech manipulation technologies, speech manipulation instruments, political media discourse, US Internet media text

The current migration crisis exists not only in real European countries, cities and towns. It is present in the information field as well. It is highlighted by thousands of media and that is the main way most people get the understanding of contemporary migration. Persons from all over the world who live far away from Greece, Germany or the UK are aware
of the migration crisis, but they perceive the situation just in the way it is represented in the media; they are not its direct participants. As it is known, the map is not the thing mapped (A. Korzybski), but media maps are the things that form the public opinion. Modern computerized life supposes a vast area of linguistic attention: Internet texts are diversified and attractive for a researcher. While working on this paper, Internet media of various forms were made use of – electronic magazines, electronic newsletters, news sites of traditional publications. An electronic media text is a logical consequence of the printed media text and possesses a significant manipulative potential. Like any other “stretch of language, either in speech or in writing, that is semantically and pragmatically coherent in its real-world context” (Carter, McCarthy), a web-based text of political media discourse realizes the intention of the communication subject to influence the mass communication object in a specific manner. The discourse in its turn refers to “the whole act of communication involving production and comprehension, not necessarily entirely verbal … The study of discourse, then, can involve matters like context, background information or knowledge shared between a speaker and hearer” (Bloor).

**Theoretical Assumptions of Speech Manipulation Realization**

The mass orientation of the political media discourse is closely related to the manipulative potential with this type of discourse. We get the prevailing part of our social and political knowledge and opinion about the world from dozens of news messages every day (Dijk). This information then projects on our model situations and further becomes public opinion. Mass media are focused on orchestrating the opinion of the reader (listener, viewer) in a special direction: “In the discursive sense the power is realized in the necessity to make other people admit the situation interpretation favourable for the speaker” (IIeïră 82). Mass media are one of the main sources to distribute the messages influencing the public opinion.

In the process of communication, aims of discourse may be achieved with the help of a whole system of various interconnected manipulative means acting as one purposeful whole, i.e. with the help of a technology. We define a speech manipulation technology as a system of using the aggregate of speech manipulation instruments in order to
purposefully guide the reality perception of the mass audience (Никитина). We define speech manipulation instruments as diverse language means used by the manipulator. The local task of the discourse subject is the most effective achievement of the global aim – the struggle for power. In the process of communication he/she makes a text. A speech manipulation technology is a means that enables a communicant to achieve the required aim in an optimal way. Let us explain this assumption. In order to realize his/her intention the discourse subject may use a non-optimal way of communication, for example, by inflating the text with evaluative words negatively characterizing their opponent. Such actions will break the secrecy principle – one of the main manipulative postulates. Such hypothetic text saturated with negative information in the denotative components of lexical units can hardly be called manipulative since it will not be effective.

Manipulativeness is the fundamental feature of the political media discourse. Manipulativeness comes out as the necessary condition to achieve the intended result of the political media discourse, and it enables the communication to be properly realized. As a matter of fact, speech manipulation is a concealed influence on the mass audience with the help of speech means aimed at guiding the perception of reality. One of the main peculiarities of speech manipulation is its purposefulness. The aim of speech manipulation is to ensure such behavior or perception of the audience which is expected by the manipulator. In other words, it is the guidance of the object’s relation towards real notions. Speech manipulation in the political media discourse is a concealed influence. The effectiveness of speech manipulation depends upon whether the audience gets its scheme. From the viewpoint of the communicant, this way of interaction is a professional righteous approach widely spread in the modern society, where getting and distributing information is the way of living. Speech manipulation is often realized in the mass media. Its subject deals with speech means, the systemic use of which generates speech manipulation technologies.

Speech manipulation technologies agree with all principles of speech manipulation. The implicit character of speech manipulation and effectivity demands prevent technologies under consideration from being explicit. The information on the surface level can differ from that on the deep level. The communicative task that can be solved with the help of
speech manipulation technologies is the optimization of the process of information transmission in the political media discourse.

The usage of speech manipulation instruments can indicate speech manipulation technologies in the political media discourse. These instruments form a special system. A system is “a group of devices or artificial objects or an organization forming a network especially for distributing something or serving a common purpose” (*Meriam-Webster Online Dictionary*). A system acts as a whole facing any outer conditions and performs a unified function. Together with the nucleus of the speech manipulation technology, the entirety of speech manipulation instruments act within the discourse to obtain its aim. They can be revealed in political mass discourse texts. Nevertheless, the subject of the discourse manipulates the conceptual text information thus solving his/her task and achieving his/her aim. The implicit message of a text may be rendered so as to determine “us” and “them,” to evaluate the matter of communication, to ridicule or ennoble it, to tell the genuine truth to the reader, etc.

In this essay we consider the realization of the speech manipulation technology “good/bad” in different electronic media. Choosing articles connected with one and the same topic, it is convenient to demonstrate the functional peculiarities of the named linguistic phenomenon. While working with the text material, it is necessary to follow a certain procedure of analysis. During the first stage, the content conceptual information is to be found out (Galperin). Thus the content conceptual information of a part of the texts of the named thematic range may be interpreted as “Migration restrictive measures in Europe are bad.” It is necessary to note that the content conceptual information gives opportunity for various interpretations and even demands diverse explanations. During the second stage, the nucleus of the content conceptual information is revealed – that part which is invariant for a large amount of texts. Considering texts of the chosen topic we can discover the following invariant – the opposition “good/bad,” that is the nucleus of the studied speech manipulation technology.

During the third stage of work, it is necessary to find systematically important technology instruments and to reveal their role in making the technological system. The whole text of an Internet media article serves to realize the content conceptual information, but some speech manipulation instruments are obligatory and relevant to solve the task and achieve the
aim of the discourse. Forming a system of interrelated means, these instruments are used in every text that realizes a certain speech manipulation technology.

The speech manipulation technology “good/bad” is used to achieve the local aim – to represent the matter of description as good or bad. The nucleus of the content conceptual information is the axiological opposition. It is surrounded by systematically important instruments, such as evaluative lexis, secondary nomination, commentaries, words with ideological connotation, words with expressive connotation, opposition and/or contrast (figure 1). Other speech manipulation instruments are also present in political media discourse texts demonstrating the named technology, but they are not obligatory. Nevertheless, they make a significant contribution to achieving the aim of communication (Никитина).

Fig.1. Speech manipulation technology "good/bad".
Practical Demonstrations of Speech Manipulation Technology
Realization

The following part of the essay contains examples that demonstrate the peculiarities of the speech manipulation technology named “good/bad”. Some words in the examples are italicized in the essay in order to emphasize the fragments that are further analyzed and that are relevant to the technology under consideration. Studying the fragments, we often turn to dictionary definitions of lexical units since they give us precious information about the discourse specificity. All definitions of lexical units in this essay are taken from *(Meriam-Webster Online Dictionary)* unless otherwise stated.

(1) “Nations along Europe’s refugee route are taking the boldest steps yet to clamp down on migrant flows, trapping thousands of *asylum seekers* and potentially blocking countless *war-weary families* from finding *sanctuary* in the West” (Faiola).

(2) “The situation *isn’t good* for us; there are *no proper* bathrooms or medical care. It’s very cold,” said Teimoorshah Yousefi, 40, one of 600 Afghans *stranded* at a northern Macedonian border crossing this week. He, along with his wife and two sons, ages 10 and 13, were being refused entry by Serbia. The family, he said, was getting *frantic* (Faiola).

(3) “But crisis-weary countries from Austria to Macedonia are now moving to *bar the doors*” (Faiola).

(4) “On Thursday, for instance, a busload of *terrified* migrants was surrounded by *an angry German mob* chanting “Go home” in the eastern city of Clausnitz” (Faiola).

(5) “Yet tens of thousands of men, women and children *fleeing violence and poverty* in their homelands continue to *risk their lives* this winter to make the relatively short and *dangerous* journey from the Turkish coast to nearby Greek islands, *seeking a better future* in Europe” (Greece migrants winter crossing).

The first four examples are taken from the same article, the author of which seeks to gain readers’ empathy to migrants which came to Europe. Most often they are called “refugees” – “someone who has been forced to leave their country, especially during a war, or for political or
religious reasons,” i.e. people who had to leave their own country because of very serious reasons. We can compare this lexical unit with “migrant” – “someone who goes to live in another area or country, especially in order to find work”, i.e. a person who seeks some financial welfare in another country. It is important to do the right choice of nomination when an event is covered in the mass media. Nomination refers to the result of naming the fragments of reality and forming appropriate notions. Usually derivatives and secondary nominations enlarge the nominative repertoire of a language (Лингвистический энциклоопедийный словарь). In the texts under consideration there are also used such lexical units as “asylum seeker” (someone who leaves their own country because they are in danger, especially for political reasons, and who asks the government of another country to allow them to live there), “war-weary families” (weary – very tired or bored, especially because you have been doing something for a long time), “people finding the sanctuary” (sanctuary – the protection that is provided by a safe place). Expressive (very, force), ideological (political and religious reasons) and evaluative connotations are actively made use of in the articles.

A certain image of a refugee is being created with the help of different kinds of connotations, the method of the semantic field generating, some other instruments. A refugee is depicted as a person who was forced to leave his motherhood in order to find a safe and secure place for himself and his family. Thus, in example 5, the verb “to flee” is being used (to run away often from danger or evil; to hurry toward a place of security). It is stressed which dangers refugees face in their own country: violence (the use of physical force to harm someone, to damage property, etc.) and poverty (the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions). That is why they are ready to take actions that can lead to bad results (to risk – to do something that could result in something bad or unpleasant) or lead to some dangerous consequences (dangerous – involving possible injury, harm, or death). All these lexical units are saturated with negative evaluative, emotive, expressive and ideological connotations: “The connotations of a language expression are semantic effects that arise from encyclopedic knowledge about its denotation (or referent) and also from
experiences, beliefs, and prejudices about the contexts in which the expression is typically used” (Leech). The role of connotations is to give the subjective colouring to the denotation. The goal which migrants are reaching is signified as "a better life." The adjective in the comparative degree represents a proper evaluative word (better – higher in quality; more attractive, appealing, effective, useful, etc.); being used with the indefinite article it intensifies the hope for a successful, safe, advantageous life (a future – the chance of future success).

On the contrary, the same situation is looked upon by representatives of European countries in quite a different way. They restrict the migrant flow, and the refugees’ actions are placed in the illegal field: “to clamp down” (to take firm action to stop a particular type of crime), “to bar” (to put a bar or a set of bars in front of a door, window, etc., so that people cannot go in or out of it). These people are “blocked” (to be placed in front of something, such as a road or path so that people or things cannot pass through), “stranded” (to live in a strange or an unfavorable place especially without funds or means to depart) and “trapped” (to be in a bad situation from which you cannot escape). They are worried and afraid (“frantic” – feeling or showing a lot of fear and worry). All the considered lexical units abound in different colours of meaning. This fact is not surprising – lexical means is the largest group of speech manipulation instruments with a great manipulative potential.

The subject of communication evaluates the situation both in the direct explicit way (quotations “not good,” “no proper”) and implicitly by hiding tips in the connotative component of lexical units: “to charge” (to say publicly that you think someone has done something wrong), “to scramble” (to move somewhere in a hurried awkward way), “to condemn” (to say very strongly that you do not approve of something or someone, especially because you think it is morally wrong). Thoroughly creating an image of intimidated migrants (“terrified” – very frightened), the authors of the articles represent Europeans in a quite unusual way: “an angry … mob” (“anger” – a strong feeling of being upset or annoyed because of something wrong or bad, the feeling that makes someone want to hurt other people, to shout, etc., “mob” – a large group or crowd of people who are angry or violent or difficult to control). The definitions of only two
words in this phrase are filled and overfilled with various connotations.

The following examples are taken from web-based articles devoted to the migration crisis in Europe as well. They serve the same aim – to demonstrate the peculiarities of the speech manipulation technology “good/bad” but they demonstrate other ways to realize the speech manipulation technology.

(6) “But border checks are bad for European business, experts say. They would even stunt economic growth through a vicious cycle that starts with higher labor costs … And thanks to an increasingly interconnected world, says Thiess Petersen, a senior economic expert at the Bertelsmann Foundation, the U.S. economy won’t escape unscathed” (Peleschuk).

(7) As Europe’s migrant crisis spiraled toward yet another humanitarian catastrophe, a European Union leader issued a stark warning Thursday to millions in search of economic opportunity: Stay away. … He beseeched people desperate for a better life to please help Europe by staying away (McAuley, Adam).

(8) In a news conference Thursday, Hollande took several minutes to arrive at the subject of Calais. Despite the tear gas French police have used against migrants this week – and beatings that have been recorded on social media – it is imperative, he said, that the migrants who remain “be welcomed with dignity” (Kanter, Chan).

(9) “The harsh measures have caused an international outcry but also genuine surprise: why has Denmark – supposedly a brand name when it comes to human rights and development – adopted such austere policies? Why is Denmark suddenly leading a race to the bottom in Europe when it comes to deterring refugees?” (Gammeltoft – Hansen, Malmvig).

The presence of evaluative lexis as a systemically important instrument of the speech manipulation technology “good/bad” is quite logical. Lexical units with evaluative meaning either in denotation or connotation perfectly meet the demand to designate “good” and “bad” notions or their properties. The evaluation in the denotation was demonstrated in examples 6 (“bad”) and 2 (“not good”, “no proper”). It is noteworthy that the negative evaluation comes not from the authors of the articles but from some third persons. As usual they remain unnamed (“experts say”). Going back to example 2, it is interesting to note a
parallel construction with negation – this method doubles the negative evaluation of the situation. Nevertheless, using evaluation in the connotative component is more preferable, since secrecy is one of the requirements of effective manipulation: “a vicious circle” (a repeating situation or condition in which one problem causes another problem that makes the first problem worse) (example 7).

Another way to intentionally evaluate the matter of communicating is the use of commentaries. These speech manipulation instruments suggest the perception of the text and its parts. Commentaries are defined as “something that shows or makes a statement about the true state or condition of something”; “an expression of opinion” (Webster). Commentaries diminish the chances of the object of communication to make his/her conclusions. Telling his/her own view on the situation, the discourse subject may emphasize some key moments, express evaluation, stress the importance of an event, etc. Moreover, when the subject comments on the words of a speaker or his interlocutor, he/she can guide the perception of the speech, explain the sense of an utterance, etc. Quoting D. Tusk’s words, the author of the article in the New York Times does not give readers an opportunity to interpret the message themselves (McAuley, Adam). “Stark warning” (stark – unpleasantly clear and impossible to avoid) in a couple of lines turns into the ironic “beseech” (to beseech – to eagerly and anxiously ask someone for something), intensified with the phrase “to please help.”

Contrast and opposition are speech manipulation instruments that constitute the technology “good/bad” and help the communicator to achieve his/her local aim. Opposition acts on the lexical level: lexical units with polar meaning are used in the framework of one sentence or passage. Such method helps to emphasize some properties in contrast to others. Contrast functions on the textual level which opposes some contrary notions and facilitates their properties. This term is “used in linguistics for a difference between units, especially one which serves to distinguish meanings in a language” (Crystal). Example 8 demonstrates the confrontation between words and the reality. Despite the fact that the migrants are greeted (“welcome” – to greet someone in a warm and friendly manner), they are met in an unfriendly manner (“tear gas,”
“beating”). In this fragment lexical units with positive and negative connotations are opposed as well. Lexis with the expressive component of meaning enables the task to be solved, i.e. to transfer the necessary information in an optimal way. The same example contains the lexical unit “imperative” (extremely important and needing to be done or dealt with immediately); it contains the expressive component, which increases the sarcastic degree in this context. Expressive lexis is noticed in other examples, such as “increasingly,” “stunt,” “beseech”.

Example 9 demonstrates abundant speech manipulation instruments that contribute to achieving the discourse aim. There can be seen both systemically important means and supplementary ones – those making communication more effective. Parallel constructions and interrogative questions add dynamism and expressiveness to the message. There are amoeba words as well - they are so characteristic of political media discourse: “human rights,” “development.” Amoeba words are “transparent” words, which are not connected with the real life. They may be used in practically any context as far as they are not connected with some real notions (Кара-Мурза 72). A characteristic feature of amoeba words is their broad semantics in the political media discourse context. They denote abstract notions with no concrete meaning. The ideological connotation can also be found in the lexical unit “human right” (one of the basic rights which many societies think every person should have to be treated in a fair equal way without cruelty, for example by their government).

In example 9, positive secondary nomination is made use of – “a brand name” (one having a well-known and usually highly regarded or marketable name); however, the adverb “supposedly” (used when saying what many people say or believe is true, especially when you disagree with them) changes the evaluation mark on the opposite. The phrase “leading a race to the bottom” adds dark colours (disapproving the situation in which companies and countries try to compete with each other by cutting wages and living standards for workers, and the production of goods is moved to the place where the wages are lowest and the workers have the fewest rights (Financial and Business Terms Dict.)). The definition demonstrates the negative attitude of the text author to the
situation. Here we can also observe a metaphoric transfer of the discourse matter in the economic field due to lexis with professional colourings ("marketable name," "cutting wages," "living standards," "production of goods," etc.). In this example some other speech manipulation instruments function; however every influencing agent cannot be considered in isolation but only as a part of a whole. Their interaction is the obligatory condition and prerequisite of manipulative technologies functioning in the political media discourse.

We hereby sum up that all systemically important speech manipulation instruments enable the discourse aim to be achieved: the matter of communication may be evaluated in a certain way in accordance with the message placed in the nucleus of the speech manipulation technology. The technological approach to speech manipulation studies helps us to find out the role each element of a system plays, to discover its contribution in achieving the aim and to answer the question – why this very instrument has been chosen. Modern linguistics methods (textual analysis, observation on textual material, definitive variant analysis) help us to look “behind” the text of political media discourse. A great deal of information in the text is not expressed explicitly, but is left implicit. The analysis of non-uttered things sometimes discloses more than the analysis of uttered ones (Dijk).

To conclude, we can state that the study of speech manipulation technologies functioning in Internet media texts devoted to the migration crisis in Europe allows us to make some interesting findings. It proved that the surface level of the text is strictly structured in order to realize the intention of the text in an optimal way and in accordance with the principles of speech manipulation. A political media discourse text possessing manipulative potential demonstrates a technologically grounded structure: its nucleus and systemically important elements that are centripetally connected with the core. The nucleus of the technology under consideration includes the opposition “good/bad.” All elements of the system functioning as a whole contribute to achieving the discourse aim. The local aim of the studied texts is to negatively evaluate the matter of communication. But this is just an opinion thoroughly translated via a large variety of web-based texts. It means that they present a point of view
on the migration problem which is not equal to the problem itself. Political media texts are a subjective, purposefully intended and properly structured rendering of the reality, and they should not be treated as objective reports of the crisis. A technological view on the migration crisis media presentations offers the challenge to look beyond the printed words and see the intention of the communicant. This knowledge will help researchers and readers critically interpret Internet news, to look for various points of view on a problem and to maintain information safety.

The technological approach to speech manipulation studies gives opportunity both to analyze political media discourse texts and to optimize them. It enriches our conception of the language regulative function. The understanding of the current migration crisis in terms of speech manipulation technologies warns us from hasty conclusions, reactions and decisions and enables us to look behind the media presentations.

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Strangers on the Doorstep: Hostility and Hospitality in

*A Distant Shore*

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Abstract
This article focuses on the rising hostility against immigrants / refugees and growing demand for hospitality, in both regional and transnational senses, in Caryl Phillips’s novel *A Distant Shore*, set in a local place in North England. I think that the author, in examining the parallel conditions of being a stranger in a village and an outsider to the nation, shows that the demands of hospitality are similarly urgent whether sought by nationals or foreigners though these are calibrated differently in terms of scales of belonging. My broader argument is that hospitality is an ethical practice of everyday life that requires continual renegotiation. Inspired by Levinasian ethics, I turn to Derrida’s and Rosello’s meditations on hospitality, which emphasise the metaphorical nature of the host-guest relationship and the tension it inscribes between the finiteness of politics and the infinity of ethics. By exploring the complex relationship between politics and ethics as this is made manifest in the literary representations of ordinary British citizens’ everyday practices, I suggest that this novel not only deals with the UK’s domestic tensions of multiculturalism and ethnic conflict, but also critically reflects on its bewildered (but hardly new) attitude toward the ongoing transnational integration of the new Europe in the postwar period.

Keywords: Caryl Phillips, Europe, refugee, immigrant, national identity, hospitality, ethics, transnational migration, racism, mobility

Caryl Phillips’s works can be considered in many ways as a manifestation of the history of black Europeans.1 *A Distant Shore* focuses on the immigration of refugees to modern England in the late 1990s. By placing his protagonists within the wider context of the black (African-Caribbean)
diaspora, Phillips offers transnational perspectives on European migration and belonging that reflect, in turn, on what it means to be European at different stages of the continent’s past. The arrivals of blacks through different routes by different ways at different times also reflect the successive changes in Europe’s geopolitical map and its tight connection with the peripheral zones. No single region or time in Europe is pure, without boundary crossing. By mapping the transnational and trans-temporal movements of black peoples, Phillips’s novels also foreground their involvement in the representation of Europe’s constructed identities and the broader cultural patterns within which those representations are framed.

In his more recent work, however, Phillips has a tendency to focus on the region.\textsuperscript{2} \textit{A Distant Shore}, for example, is set in a small town in northern England, while the last section of \textit{Foreigners} is located in the provincial city of Leeds.\textsuperscript{3} By ‘region’ I do not mean that these locations are of minor significance, rather that their scale is smaller in comparison to the nations, continents and empires that form the social, political and geographical background to his earlier works. I have no wish here to undermine the transnational dimensions of Phillips’s works, which are often read as counteracting the parochialism of nationalist racisms. In fact, Phillips’s regional settings might be seen, to some extent at least, as staging post-national conditions in Europe, which are shaped by the triangulation of global flows, transnational entities (especially the EU), and region-based nationalisms. Far from bringing Britain and continental Europe closer together, these conditions have produced animated disagreements about EU migration policy, leading for example to debates about what to do with would-be asylum-seekers looking to smuggle themselves into England on cross-Channel trains and ferries. Britain’s and France’s shared unwillingness to deal with people foreign to them has made identity politics on both sides of the Channel more complicated, though not necessarily less embattled, than the mere repetition of ancient histories of Anglo-French animosity might suggest. Britain, for its part, often portrays these people as intruders to the country, while their presence also provides an unwanted reminder of the ever-increasing
power of the EU and a continuation of the territorial losses associated with the end of Empire.

In the recent history of Britain, debate – and the moral panic it sometimes spawns – about race and difference has tended to centre on the metropolis. However, public disquiet has now arguably shifted to centre on regional towns like Margate and Dover; and, as a result, costal territories have become the new frontier for defenders of contemporary nationhood and rights for whites. By reading *A Distant Shore* within the context of a small region (by which I mean a physical idea – a dwelling place where a person’s everyday life and relational networks are physically grounded – as well as a symbolic concept – the space of belonging where a subject is able to root or re-root psychically), my purpose in this article is to see the region as a confronting zone of racism as well as a starting point for the ethical imagination. As I hope to show, in *A Distant Shore* it is in the ambivalent region, where different peoples interact, that the distance between local and global is traversed and the colour line is drawn and redrawn.

*A Distant Shore* depicts the encounter between an alienated white woman and an alienated black man, the latter of whom is later violently attacked and murdered. Dorothy is a newly retired, divorced music teacher who has recently moved back to the small town she grew up in, while Gabriel/ Solomon is a refugee recently arrived from Africa and now working as a night watchman. By comparing the condition of being a stranger in a village to that of being an outsider in a nation, the novel asks us to think about several scales of belonging, all of which are linked with the issue of place. Place, indeed, is at the very centre of the novel. At the beginning, we are introduced to a place called Weston, which is reluctantly undergoing a name-change because of new development. What makes this rather dull village – “the biggest thing that had ever happened [here] was Mrs. Thatcher closing the pits, and that was over twenty years ago” (4) – meaningful is its historical connection with other European towns. It is twinned with a German town that was almost razed to the ground by the RAF during World War II and a French village whose Jewish inhabitants, once in the majority, were sent to the concentration camps during the same period (4). However, Phillips hints that the local
residents’ insistence on the town’s original name derives from their pride in being *removed* from Europe. The identity of the town, as Rebecca Walkowitz points out, “seems to depend on its status as a place where bombing and deportation did not take place” (542).

By contrasting the brave military action conducted by the Royal Air Force with the disgraceful support for the Nazis in occupied France, Phillips implies that a kind of “ethical superiority” lurks somewhere in the residents’ collective mind-set: they are proud of the town’s ‘remoteness’, even if this remoteness “makes [it] a bit tame” (4). Weston, however, is not as tame – nor indeed as remote – as many of its inhabitants believe it to be. The perception of remoteness can also be interpreted as an act of historical denial, reminiscent of Britain’s blindness to its own racism. Meanwhile, Weston’s complacency in the historical victory over Nazism can be seen in terms of what Paul Gilroy calls

> a rejection of deferral of its present problems. Neither the appeal of homogeneity nor the antipathy toward immigrants and strangers who represent the involution of national culture can be separated from underlying hunger for reorientation. Turning back in this direction is also a turning away from the perceived dangers of pluralism and from the irreversible fact of multiculturalism. (*After Empire* 97)

By referencing Weston’s civic twins to the war experiences, this small town is suffering from what Gilroy has called “post-imperial melancholia”, a syndrome rooted in past victories and the inability to adapt to the profound changes in circumstances and mood that followed the end of Empire.

The novel opens with the deceptively simple comment: “England has changed” (3). As the narrative progresses, we can certainly see the alteration of rural landscapes, the renaming of the town, and changes in demography, but we also begin to realise that – attitudinally at least – England has not changed a lot. Instead, the country appears to be racked by enduring social tensions: confusions of national identity, an unfixed sense of belonging, persistent racial conflicts. The instances of racism that we witness in the novel – from threatening letters and graffiti, and excrement being pushed through someone’s letter-box, to muggers – are
characteristic of a volatile post-war social climate that continues to be heavily influenced by the exclusivist directives of the nation-state.

The obliviousness of the town to its own prejudices shapes the residents’ hostile attitude towards ‘outsiders’. The landlord of the local pub is a typical Westoner, who believes that Solomon’s death is an accident because “nobody in Weston would do anything like this” (48). As he tells Dorothy: “If you’ve lived here as long as I have … and you’ve grown up with folks like these, you’d understand that there’s not one among them capable of harming anybody. That’s just how they are. Decent folk committed to their families and their community” (48-9). Meanwhile, Dorothy’s sedentary father, anxious about his Englishness, is always “bemoaning the fact that we were giving up our English birthright and getting lost in a United States of Europe” (27). He demonstrates strong racial prejudice, not only to people of colour – “a challenge to our English identity” – but also to other ethnic groups: the Welsh, for example, he finds to be “full of sentimental stupidity [while] the Scots [are] hopelessly mean and mopish … and the Irish [are just] violent, Catholic drunks” (42). For him, being English means, emphatically, “no coloureds” (42).

The novel traces the connections between such routine abuse, later extended to the Indian newsagent Ranjit, and the extreme attack that causes Solomon’s death and his dumping in the local canal. Violence is similarly linked to anxiety over belonging at a time when “it’s difficult to tell who’s from around here and who’s not. Who belongs and who’s a stranger. It’s disturbing. It’s doesn’t feel right” (3). The town’s increasing inability to distinguish a newcomer from a local also helps us to understand the alienated conditions of the novel’s two protagonists. Before Solomon comes to knock on Dorothy’s door and start their friendship, they are completely lonely. He is a black man and, as such, is unaccepted by the community; while she is isolated from people because of her mental illness. Both are aware of being the subject of conversations that people of Weston feel comfortable enough to conduct but that none of them really cares about. Dorothy’s health condition, her retired life, and her private relationship are all topics of gossip: “it’s a small village … [T]hese people, they talk” (23). Her unwillingness to blend in with the
local residents is like Solomon’s inability to integrate into the community: both are abnormal to this quintessentially ordinary town.

Their alienation from society can also be traced in the different perspectives they use to look at the world. In many scenes, Dorothy sees the outer world from behind a shield of glass – the window of a building, at the pub or her own house, or the windscreen of Solomon’s car or a bus. The world seen this way is transparent; everything seems to unfold before the observer but at the same time to be remote, inaccessible or unrelated. On her way back to the town from the seaside, Dorothy looks outside over the driver’s shoulder, finding “nothing inviting” about the “dull and uneventful” landscapes (58). Dorothy’s life in Weston is like moving from one transparent box to another: there is much to see, but communication is out of reach. Only when she is in the graveyard to visit her dead parents does she reveal more of her thoughts. But talking alone in the graveyard is regarded as evidence of her disorder, which removes her from people further. If suspicion makes Dorothy seal herself in her own world, the hostility towards Solomon drives him to retreat to his bare bungalow. Like Dorothy, he looks at the world cautiously, from behind the blinds, but he is powerless to prevent the threat on his doorstep – abusive letters with razors inside, dog mess in his mailbox and, eventually, a deadly knock on his front door.

By comparing the man’s direct experience of racism with the woman’s acute loneliness, Phillips suggests that the town’s exclusion of strangers, like the woman, is not so different from the motives involved in attacking a foreign man. In fact, these two kinds of hostility arguably derive from the same source of nativist or tribal thinking. Dorothy comes back to her hometown for emotional refuge when her life hits rock bottom – forced retirement, fruitless relationships, and the passing away of her younger sister. Meanwhile, Solomon, escaping from the massacre of the civil war in his country, resettles with the help of the Anderson family and restarts his life in England. Both are left alone in a world with unbearable traumas. Through their stories, we eventually discover that the woman is as rootless as the man. Both are displaced, both seeking refuge in their own way.
Phillips’s concern for humanity extends beyond his individual characters’ inner and outer ordeals. As McLeod notes, the novel is “concerned centrally with the temporary yet invaluable encounter between tangential peoples that evidence their myriad, unexpected, yet day-to-day participation in each others’ lives”, and this opens up a possibility for ethical interaction, even if such interaction is hugely fragile and continually obstructed by “prejudicial barriers” of all kinds (“Diaspora and Utopia” 12). Perhaps the best example is the way in which Gabriel/Solomon turns his initial dislike of Denise into eventual empathy for her and a growing understanding of the pain she has suffered in her life. McLeod argues that such everyday kinds of interpersonal engagement and support possess a more progressive and transformative meaning than more spectacular, state-sanctioned celebrations of multicultural flux. As a consequence, he suggests, Phillips directs our attention to the “endless proliferating tactics of everyday life, which are proffered not as political stratagems but as an ethical imperative” (13-4). In what follows, I would like to further test this ethical imperative – which, after Levinas, I will locate in the everyday experience of negotiating between infinity and finiteness – by looking at the demands of hospitality and both the possibilities and limitations it provides.

On the morning when the lorry driver Mike brings Solomon home, Mr. Anderson is eating his regular breakfast. His reactions to a stranger’s unanticipated arrival are unflustered:

“Well, sit down. We’ll get you some breakfast, then find you somewhere to put your stuff.” The man returned to reading his newspaper. It was a very large newspaper, and I notice that he seemed to be experiencing some difficulty folding the paper into a proper shape. Curiously enough, his problem was occupying him more than the strangeness of a foreign person having crossed his threshold. (277)

Soon after Anderson and Mike have finished their breakfast and left, Anderson’s wife is left alone with the stranger. Sitting in an ordinary kitchen, and accompanied by a woman standing by the sink, her hands full of soapy water, Solomon proceeds to tell her stories about the plight of his country, and about his hard journey to England and his equally hard experiences there, which he has never revealed to anyone before. The
Anderson family not only offer the best hospitality they can, they later help him to transfer his residence status to legal. However, this hospitality, generous though it is, fails to eradicate suspicion. Solomon appreciates the favours that are being shown him, but he has extreme difficulty in believing that such generosity might be given out of a pure desire to help. After such a long journey, he has finally met someone who is willing to understanding his suffering, but he dares not tell the whole story because he fears being betrayed. Allowed to live with the Anderson family before finishing his asylum process, and also promised some unofficial work, Solomon cannot believe his own good fortune: “I look at the woman and attempt to fathom her motives. Would she and her husband receive some special reward? If so, then I would not begrudge them their bounty, for my sole desire was to be safe in England” (279). Still distrustful, Solomon conceals those stories that might compromise his welcome significantly – his aggressive army nickname “Hawk”, his robbery-and-assault of his good friend, his rape charge in England. These things happened when he was still called Gabriel; and it seems entirely reasonable to believe that if Mrs. Anderson had learned of these ‘Gabriel stories’, she might have curtailed her hospitality or even thrown him out of the house. This episode demonstrates what ideal hospitality consists of, but also paradoxically implies that even an extreme form of hospitality is also a form of mistrust since it coexists with exclusion and can easily be betrayed. The host takes risks, but so does the guest.

By highlighting a multiple but contrary character – a soldier as well as a victim of a civil war, a criminal of murder and burglary but a good man with refined manners – Phillips succeeds in complicating our understanding of the ethical demands of hospitality and the relationship between those who give and receive it: benefactor and beneficiary; host and guest. He also complicates the view of hospitality as a (pro-immigrant) counter-discourse to (anti-immigrant) state preventionism, featuring a mutually beneficial relationship between the generous host and the polite, industrious guest. Hospitality, Phillips suggests, is altogether more ambiguous and unstable than this. A brief aside on Derrida’s important writings on hospitality may help us understand why.
In his reading of Levinas’s *Totality and Infinity*, Derrida argues that Levinas has bequeathed to us an “immense treatise on hospitality”: the conjunction of an ethics of pure prescription with the idea of an infinite and absolute hospitality, Derrida argues, confronts us with one of the most pressing political, juridical and institutional issues of our time. Derrida’s crucial distinction is between an *ethics* and a *politics* of hospitality. He sees the former as being infinite and beyond any human law, while the latter inevitably “involves limits and borders: calculation and management of finite resources, finite number of people, national borders and state sovereignty” (Rosello 11). However, these seemingly incompatible concepts are effectively inseparable in Phillips’s novel. Throughout the novel, the ‘infinite’ ethical horizon of hospitality is in almost constant tension with the ‘finite’ demands of politics. In explaining his concerns to Solomon, Mr. Anderson cites the example of country’s crowded hospitals: “It’s just that this isn’t a very big island and we don’t have that much room. People think that other countries should take you first because we’ve done our bit … Some folk think … [t]hat you just want an easy living, or that you have too many children. They think you don’t really want to work” (289). These concerns correspond to a common-sense wisdom about the need for thresholds and “acceptable percentages” of migration that is articulated forcefully by Mike, who is afraid of “living in a foreign country” if nobody “puts an end to all this immigration” (290).

Another factor in the novel that further complicates the concept of hospitality is the need to distinguish hospitality from the ‘gift’ or the process of material exchange. At first sight, the Andersons’ warm welcome to Solomon is unconditional. Since the rainy night when Mike first opened his lorry door to a stranger, bought him food, and finally offered him long-term accommodation in his family’s house, all the favours bestowed upon Solomon have been given to him like gifts, without any thought of recompense or repayment. But this hospitality is linked, not just to sympathy for Solomon’s past but also to his likely productivity in the future: “You see, you’re in a different situation … You’re escaping oppression and that’s different. … I mean, you’re working. You’re not a scrounger” (290-91).
Solomon’s potential contribution to society and his economic productivity become the very conditions that vouchsafe his hospitality. As Rosello points out, the ambiguity of hospitality is evident in its split between two idealised processes of negotiation: “ethically, hospitality is imagined as an infinite, unconditional, selfless, and endless gift (of your time, of your space, of your resource) on the one hand; politically, it can be conceptualized as a well-balanced exchange of mutual services” or benefits, on the other (52). Working may be one way of protecting the host-guest relationship from abuse, but being a guest always implies an expectation to leave, even in unconditional forms of hospitality. The guest is warmly welcomed, is made to feel at home, but is continually reminded that this is not home at all. The host is generous because he realises that it is only a temporary visit and the guest will leave sooner or later. From this perspective, infinite hospitality is precipitated back on its own finite boundaries, while even the initial welcome can be seen as asserting the authority of ownership, the mastership of the house. Hospitality reinforces the fixed relationship between the host and the guest, or, as Derrida puts it tellingly:

To dare say welcome is perhaps to insinuate that one is at home here, that one knows what it means to be at home, and that at home one receives, invites, or offers hospitality, thus appropriating a space for oneself, a space to welcoming the other, or, worse, welcoming the other in order to appropriate for oneself a place and then speak the language of hospitality. (Adieu to Levinas 15)

In A Distant Shore, the distinction between host and guest is tested to its limits and becomes interchangeable. With the help of the Andersons, Solomon obtains the legal right to stay in the country and is employed in the bungalow as a night watchman. This means he is given ownership of a house and has the capability to offer hospitality, as he does when he invites Dorothy for a cup of tea at his place. But the law cannot protect his status since he is still, officially, an uninvited guest. In the end, his life is cut short by some local young people after another ironically unlawful entry. Through the tragic case of Solomon, Phillips neither confirms the impracticability of hospitality nor articulates the incompatibility between ethical and political forms of hospitality; instead, he makes readers
rethink what hospitality is and opens up a possibility of shifting between these two types. As Rosello comments sharply, “hospitality as metaphor blurs the distinction between a discourse of rights and a discourse of generosity, the language of social contracts and the language of excess and gift-giving” (9). Hospitality as a practice of ethics is always negotiated between the two poles of absolutely gratuitous gift (an ideal of ethics) and impeccably equivalent exchange (the politics of justice or the principle of economy). Only through the asymmetrical demand from the other and the absolute sacrifice of the self can the infinity of ethics be manifested and maintained.

Solomon’s situation reflects the contest between a hospitality of invitation and a hospitality of visitation. In the former, only those who are invited and recognized as guests will be hosted, whereas the latter leaves one’s house open to the unanticipated arrival. Although the conditional hospitality is premised on the moral equality of each person, it entails, in Will Kymlicka’s word, “embarrassment” over conventional congruence of citizenship and territory boundaries with which ethical obligations have been inscribed into the procedures of public political deliberation, legal procedures and administered law (249). Regarding the predicament of enacting the virtues of hospitality within European countries, Derrida’s absolute ethical appeal for the opening of a space into which the new arrivals can be admitted reminds us that the process of hospitality is not a fixed dichotomy, but a continuous shifting and shuttling of perspectives. Due to “the impossibility of waiting for the end of reflection,” there is a need to take immediate action “with the utmost urgency” at the moment of undecidability (298). Upon the ideal of unconditionality, we might rethink the interrupting presence of the unforeseen arrivals and wonder if the nation state is still the requisite vehicle for enacting hospitality especially facing the humanitarian and political crisis within European countries.

By selecting two places implicated in Nazi crimes to represent Germany and France, respectively, and by clearly linking these to Weston, Phillips asks us to consider the difference between what we assume about English hospitality and what we learn about the actual treatment of strangers, in England and elsewhere. Phillips is skilled in juxtaposing different experiences in order to display the multiple connections and
entanglements between his characters. The plot of *A Distant Shore* revolves around similar rejections of very dissimilar kinds of strangers. These figures include a local shop owner from Pakistan, an Irish doctor with a Jewish surname, and, most prominently, a male refugee from Africa and a retired teacher suffering from a psychological disorder. By comparing these strangers, and by comparing anti-immigrant racism to other systems of racism, Phillips blurs the boundaries between who is an insider and who an outsider, who is included and who excluded. Elsewhere, he writes of a new order

in which there will be one global conversation with limited participation open to all, and full participation available to none. In this new world nobody will feel fully at home. … In this new world order of the twenty-first century we are all being dealt an ambiguous hand, one which may eventually help us to accept the dignity which informs the limited participation of the migrant, the asylum seeker, or the refugee. (*A New World Order* 5-6)

In a small town like Weston, even the locals are unable to “feel fully at home,” but this only leads them to vent their frustrations on unsolicited migrants. *A Distant Shore* emerges, not only as a nuanced examination of current debates on hospitality in Europe, but also as a powerfully ambivalent analysis of the situation of the irregular migrant in a radically unstable new world. As Phillips’s work suggests, the presence of cross-Channel refugees is fundamental to the make-up of a British society whose renewed anxieties about strangers are inextricably tied to its shifting attitudes to Europe at local, national and transnational levels. This regional novel, I suggest, offers a window onto contemporary debates about human rights, social integration, multiculturalism and citizenship not only about the domestic situation within the UK, but also, in a broader sense of EU, about the sizzling discontent of member countries when facing unprecedented population movements recently. In other words, the recent acrimonious dispute over the relocation scheme is not really about numbers, but rather a concern over member state sovereignty and its close tie to identity. In light of ideas of hospitality, this novel shows that state interest and local ethics of hospitality are always in tension. To emphasize the contradictory logic of hospitality is not to suggest the failure of policy,
but instead, upon the call of absolute hospitality, to foster new ways of inclusion which we may simply not recognize yet.

Notes:

1 In fact, treating his writings in chronological order, we can trace the whole history of black Europe from the fifteenth century to the present. The first period is epitomized by Othello in *The Nature of Blood*, whose first-person narrative tells the story of his movements in and around the Mediterranean in the fifteenth century. *Cambridge* depicts the first arrival of blacks in England during the heyday of British colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. *The Final Passage* represents the post-war migration of West Indians after 1948, which brought Phillips himself to Britain as a child.

2 In his recent research of landscape and narrative design, David James also notices how the contemporary regional novel finds new horizons through the interface of spatial politics and provincial realism in the face of globalism. See *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (London: Continuum, 2008).

3 Phillips’s more recent novel *In the Falling Snow* (2009) deals with the life crisis of a black white-collar, middle-aged male Londoner.

4 The theme of hospitality plays an important part in Derrida’s philosophy. This concept reflects his lifelong interest in the rhetoric of the impossible. “The gift is the impossible,” he argues in “The Time of the King” (124); and elsewhere he writes: “For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter gift, or debt. If the other gives me back or owes me or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift” (*Given Time* 12). As long as a gift is taken as a gift, the essential meaning of the gift, to be given and received with no moral obligation, will soon be erased. Hence the paradox is that there will be no gift if a gift is taken as a gift.

Works Cited


An Empty Table and an Empty Boat: Empathic Encounters with Refugee Experiences in Intermedial Installation Art

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Abstract
This essay is an inquiry into two intermedial installations that address the experiences of people on the run from war or poverty, yet overtly hinder and problematize the viewer’s identification with the depicted refugees. By doing so, Friday Table (2013) by art collective Foundland, and Isaac Julien’s video installation Ten Thousand Waves (2010) differ from the many contemporary discourses dealing with the so-called refugee crisis that suggest a blind assumption of empathy’s benevolence. Taking theoretical texts concerning the relation between empathy, politics and the (lens-based) representation of refugees by, for instance, Slavoj Zizek (2016) and Jill Bennett (2005) as a starting point, I read Friday Table and Ten Thousand Waves as reflections on the pitfalls as well as the critical political possibilities of empathy in contemporary debates on refugees. Moreover, I argue that the two lens-based installations in question are able to examine the limits of empathy and identification with refugees through their common denominator: intermediality. Both Friday Table and Ten Thousand Waves combine lens-based media (photography, video and film) with non-lens-based medial forms such as drawings, graphs and calligraphy. As I will demonstrate, the interplay between different media is decisive when it comes to the way in which the three works of art produce, manage and reflect on the relation between spectators and depicted refugees.

Keywords: refugees, empathy, identification, political, intermediality, art
Introduction

“Look Through The Eyes of a Refugee.” With this catch phrase printed on flyers and posters, a museum named The Humanity House in the Netherlands advertises for an exhibition titled *The Asylum Search Engine*. In what the museum calls a cross-medial installation, the visitor is invited to step into the footsteps of an individual who is forced to leave her house and country for safety reasons. In addition to watching films, photographs and videos by several artists, the visitor can walk a route through dark corridors, boarded up doors and windows, containers and models of border-crossing points. Surrounded by sounds of panic, photographs of war and destruction, as well as video testimonies of actual refugees, the visitor is – according to the museum – enabled to experience “what it must feel like to have to survive in an area that is affected by disaster or conflict.”

This invitation to empathy (derived from the Greek *empatheia*, an assimilated form of *en* “in” and *pathos* “feeling”) is not unique. *The Asylum Search Machine* is an unequivocal example of a wider tendency in current artistic media practices. Many contemporary works of visual art that deal with the theme of forced migration produce specific empathic relations between Western viewers and non-Western refugees. This tendency can be seen in light of the so-called refugee crisis. For, as the website of the Humanity House explains, it is pivotal today to project oneself in the position of others, as the approach of unknown others has led to over-simplified views on refugees: “The refugee crisis has deeply divided Europe. … There is little nuance in the heated debates. Asylum seekers are either unwelcome parasites who feed on our wealth or pitiful figures deserving of our compassion.” With *The Asylum Search Engine*, the Humanity House wishes to address the refugee crisis by asking the museum visitor: “How do you relate to these people? What responsibilities do you, as a Dutch citizen, have for our policies?” By feeling what refugees feel in both emotional and physical respects, by identifying with people “who seem to come from a different world; a place of war, violence and poverty,” visitors might meet the museum’s
general premise, which is “to increase understanding, to inspire people to contribute positively to a life of peace and freedom for everybody.”

It is hard to argue against the noble aims of the museum (who would refute a life of peace and freedom for everybody?), nor can the observation on Europe’s division over the refugee crisis be denied. However, the effectivity of the exhibition should be questioned. The route that is supposed to mimic a flight over borders from danger to safety is nothing more than an artificial décor in which the visitor can safely follow red arrows on the floor from start to finish. At no point does the installation succeed in provoking feelings in the visitor that one might associate with forced migration, such as fear and feelings of loss. Nor does the installation raise some of the experiential categories that T.J. Demos has aptly associated with the refugee, such as spatial insecurity, perceptual disorientation, bodily uncertainty and reality’s substitution by reverie’s wonder (73, 83). Instead of allowing the viewer to feel like a refugee, it rather installs feelings of distance and detachment by demonstrating how large the experiential gap is between a citizen living in a safe area and an asylum seeker or a migrant undertaking a dangerous journey to Europe. In addition, the installation does not escape from the cliché it wishes to refute: the exhibited photographs and video interviews do paint a picture of pitiful victims in need of compassion and help from the West. Shown on small screens in suitcases, with the rules of international humanitarian law on a juxtaposed wall, the filmed subjects look like oblivious objects that need protection and education.

In spite of, or perhaps precisely because of the fact that The Asylum Search Machine does not meet the aims that are so explicitly set forth on the museum’s website, the installation is able to point out that creating an empathic relation between viewers and refugees by way of artistic representation can be problematic, as distance and objectification are easily reinforced instead of obliterated. In addition, The Asylum Search Machine raises questions as to the political relevance of empathy in the current refugee crisis. Does empathy lead as unidirectional to understanding and peace as the promotional texts of the Humanity House suggest? And to what extent is the understanding that might be brought about a political form of understanding? (At what point) can placing
oneself in someone else’s shoes lead to a critical reflection on national or international politics? When are artistic representations of refugees able to incorporate each viewer’s individual experience of looking/feeling from a new perspective into a wider political context in which power relations are deliberated and analyzed? In this essay, I will bring these questions to bear on two lens-based works of art in which forced migration is a dominant theme: a photographic installation titled *Friday Table* (2013) by art collective Foundland and Isaac Julien’s video installation *Ten Thousand Waves* (2010).

These two works of art are in a way the opposite of the promotional texts on *The Asylum Search Machine* that promise full access to the experience of refugees. For although the two installations, like *The Asylum Search Machine*, address the experiences of people on the run from war or poverty, they hinder and problematize rather than invite to identification with refugees. This is not to say that *Friday Table* and *Ten Thousand Waves* do not construct a relation between their viewers and the represented subjects. However, instead of suggesting a blind assumption of empathy’s benevolence, the two works of art I will discuss can be read as critical reflections on the possibilities and pitfalls of empathy in contemporary debates on refugees.

Moreover, I argue that the two lens-based installations in question are able to examine the limits of empathy and identification with refugees through their common denominator: intermediality. Both *Friday Table* and *Ten Thousand Waves* combine lens-based media (photography, video and film) with non-lens-based medial forms such as drawings, graphs and computer generated images. As I will demonstrate, the interplay between different media is decisive when it comes to the way in which the three works of art produce, manage and reflect on the relation between spectators and depicted refugees. In order to examine how the intermedial strategies of *Friday Table* and *Ten Thousand Waves* affect the audience, it is first necessary to take a look at some of the theoretical debates concerning the relation between empathy, politics and the (lens-based) representation of refugees.
1. Theoretical Perspectives on Empathy

Overpowering and Crude Empathy

According to political theorist Slavoj Žižek, recent “appeals to our empathy towards the poor refugees flowing to Europe are not enough” (8). In his book Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours (2016), Žižek argues that our (European) response to the refugee crisis offers two versions of what he calls ideological blackmail: either we try to pull up the drawbridge, or we open our doors as widely as possible. Both solutions are bad, Žižek claims, yet the theorist particularly criticizes the “hypocrites” who advocate open borders: “secretly, they know very well this will never happen” (8). Playing the Beautiful Soul by displaying altruistic virtues and pleading for humanitarian help does not lead to large-scale solutions (99-100). By referring to Oscar Wilde’s lines that “it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought” (8), Žižek suggests that when it comes to the refugee crisis, feeling bad for the people at Europe’s borders is insufficient: we need to think about what has to be done. Our proper aim “should be to try and reconstruct a global society on such a basis that desperate refugees will no longer be forced to wander around” (Žižek 9). First of all, in order to reconstruct such a global society, an analysis of the current one is needed. In Against the Double Blackmail, Žižek therefore critically addresses a variety of political issues that are related to causes of the current refugee crisis and explain the flow to Europe, such as the dynamics of global capitalism, economic neo-colonialism, the rise of a new slavery and the possibility that we are approaching a new era of apartheid in which a privileged “Inside” excludes and oppresses those left vulnerable outside (6).

Notwithstanding the thought-provoking qualities of Žižek’s polemical political analyses, on which much more can be said, it is mainly his dismissal of empathy as “not enough” that needs expounding in the context of this essay. This will be done by adding two possible stances towards empathy to Žižek’s theory. Firstly, it is possible to argue that in the current refugee crisis empathy is not merely inadequate (not enough); it is often overpowering as well, too much. Secondly, I will argue that
besides being not enough, or too much, empathy can at times serve as (a stepping stone to) critical political thought and/or intervention.

The overpowering form of empathy is related to the fact that refugees are hypervisible today. Although many have travelled the routes to “Fort Europe” over the last decades, the dangers and dramas that mark forced migration to Europe have been invisible for a long time. Only recently, dramatic images of suffering, huddling masses of migrants crossing the ocean in overcrowded ramshackle boats, landing on the shores of Europe, increasingly inhabit our television screens and newspaper pages (Vium 217). As Christian Vium puts it well: “Stripped of their history, these migrants become visible to us only at the height of their suffering: undifferentiated, shipwrecked souls with gleaming white eyes, exhausted [or deceased, we might add] by dehydration and days spent at sea” (217). Although it is to be expected that a growing familiarity with the many pictures of suffering refugees will eventually lead to numbness – as also claimed, for instance, by Susan Sontag (20) with respect to photographs of the Holocaust – and hence a blocking of empathy, recent media coverages of the refugee crisis were not received with apathy. Especially the horrific images of drowned children and consequential photographs and videos of parental grief produced strong emotional responses in many European viewers.

However, these explicit images of suffering and death tend to foster emotional identifications and promote what Bertolt Brecht called “crude empathy,” defined as the tendency to abstract from the specifics of the life depicted and identify with a single emotion or affect; to respond by thinking “I wonder what it would be like if that happened to me” (Brecht qtd. in Bennett 111). This crude empathy is similar to a form of identification that Kaja Silverman termed *idiopathic* identification: identification on the basis of a (projected) likeness. In a slightly “cannibalistic” process, the other is taken into the self. Features of the other that are similar to the self are enhanced in the process, while features that remain irreducibly other are cast aside or ignored. As a result, the other “becomes” or “becomes like” the self. Hence, this form of identification, which Silverman terms *idiopathic*, relies on seeing the other as similar to the self.
In *Empathic Vision* (2005), Jill Bennett aptly points out the problematic nature of crude empathy: “What is wrong with this kind of empathy is, of course, that another’s experience ... is assimilated to the self in the most simplistic and sentimental way; anything the audience’s immediate experience remains beyond comprehension” (111). Bennett refers to Geoffrey Hartman here, who has identified this problematic as central to the empathetic relationship as it arises between an audience and victims who give testimony: “the pathos of the testimonial moment loses its specific context precisely because it arouses a widespread anxiety.” In overidentifying with those who testify, we fail “to respect the difference between their suffering and our own” (Hartman qtd. in Bennett 111).

The fact that contemporary representations of refugees, either in testimonial form or not, often stimulate rather than halt such assimilating forms of overidentification, can be explained by a prevailing humanitarian approach to refugees. As the afore discussed promotional texts on the website of the Humanity House also express, the act of imagining oneself into someone else’s desperate situation is often seen as redemptive. Once we realize we are all the same, that we share the same fears and emotions, that we could be in the same boat, we can open our hearts and borders to the strangers who are just like us. Such an assumption does not merely fail to acknowledge the distinct nature of the suffering of refugees, and the extent to which it cannot be shared. It also fails to recognize the incommensurability of the political status of European citizens on the one hand, and nationless refugees in camps on the other. As Europeans, we are not in the same boat, and as Žižek remarks, “it would be extremely presumptuous to think so” (81). In this vein, the latter proposes to cut the link between refugees and humanitarian empathy, in which we ground our help to refugees in our compassion for their suffering. “We should,” Žižek argues, “help them because it is our ethical duty to do so, ..., but without the sentimentalism that breaks down the moment we realize that most of the refugees are not ‘people like us’” (82). For Žižek, human universality is a universality of “strangers,” of individuals reduced to impenetrability in relation to others and themselves (79).
Managed Empathy and Critical Thought Through Art

What Žižek overlooks in his dismissal of empathy and his insistence on a universality of strangeness, though, is the possibility of an empathic encounter that respects the impenetrability of the other’s experience. In *Empathic Vision*, Bennett discusses a managed form of empathy, in which a spectator can feel into the body of another person, yet without indulging in identification, as the illusion of the representation (Bennett discusses a puppet-play on the TRC in South Africa) is constantly broken down (123). Bennett bases her idea of the empathic encounter on the face-to-face encounter in the sense evoked by Gayatri C. Spivak. Through encounters, the difference between the one who testifies and the one who listens – or between the one who is depicted and the one who is looking – is not necessarily eradicated, although it may be reduced; “it is, more precisely, inhabited” (Bennett 105). Via Spivak’s idea of the encounter, Bennett points out a mode of empathic looking “that can support and tolerate difference rather than either repudiating it or assimilating the experience of the other to the self” (105).

This brings me to my second addition – or alternative – to Žižek’s discussion of empathy in relation to the refugee crisis: the notion that empathy can at times lead to or serve as a political act and/or analysis. Whereas emotionalism and sentimental identification have been ruled out as viable political responses, for instance, by Brecht and Arendt respectively, Bennett argues (following Deleuze) that affects – through art – may take us toward a form of critical thinking. Affective identifications, mediated through bodily perception, may induce empathy that leads to critical understanding. The managed form of empathy which some art works are able to produce undercuts rather than affirms the bounds of subjectivity, thereby taking us beyond ourselves, yet without taking us entirely into the place of the other or usurping the other into the self (Bennett 104, 123). Through art, this form of empathy rather allows us to inhabit the space – the difference – between ourselves and others.

This possibility is potentially political when we follow Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic model of the political. Within this model of democratic politics, public spaces are a battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted without any possibility of final
reconciliation (Mouffe 10). Instead of inscribing pluralism and the ability to see things from other perspectives into a horizon of intersubjective agreement, as Arendt did, Mouffe insists on “the eradicability of antagonism, of what Lyotard refers to as the ‘differend’” (10). Within agonistic political spaces, conflicts of interest and/or intersubjective differences are confronted (encountered, we might say) but not resolved. Empathy is related to this agonistic model of the political – albeit implicitly – by Anthony Clohesy who claims in *Politics of Empathy* that empathy is a necessary condition for democracy, because it gives us a sense of difference, a sense that there are other ways of being in the world. It allows us to see how we have denied the singularity of those we now recognize (3). In sum, works of art that produce empathic encounters in which differences between self and others are acknowledged, seen and inhabited, can be understood as agonistic political spaces.

**Problems of Representation: Layered Lenses and Bare Life**

The idea of art works as political spaces that set up empathic encounters between viewers and represented subjects is problematic when it comes to lens-based representations of refugees. First of all, this has to do with what I would call the violating capacities of lens-based media. In the course of their histories, photography and film have been intertwined with colonial, anthropological and medical discourses. The two media were believed to serve as epistemological tools in these discourses, as neutral technologies capable of representing reality in an objective, transparent manner. However, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, the specificity of a medium lies in its technological support plus a layer of conventions (16). Although both the technological support and the heterogeneous set of conventions can change over time (making this a non-essentialist notion of medium specificity), the violent heritage of film and photography is to some extent still present in the conventions of both media.

Objectifying and appropriating representational forms deriving, for instance, from anthropometrical measuring and mapping “vacant” land still surface in applications of film and photography. This also goes for the conventions of early twentieth-century documentary photography and film that centered on the poor social classes. As Brian Winston has
convincingly demonstrated, these representations re-victimized their subjects by presenting them as objects without any agency (273). In addition to this, feminist film scholars, such as Laura Mulvey, have exposed how the application of film in the domain of narrative cinema has led to another set of harmful conventions: montage sequences which produce an objectifying gaze. Through a succession of shots and reverse shots of looking and looked-at characters, classical fiction films tend to suture images of female characters to the gaze of male protagonists, who look at women as objects of desire. The medium of video, finally, is often described as a cold, objectifying medium. Grainy images in low resolution, shot from a static high angle, are associated with the controlling gaze of the surveillance camera. Thus, power is exercised by medial conventions. In the case of the representation of refugees, this could aggravate the already asymmetrical power relations between viewers and refugees and turn an encounter between them from an intersubjective to an objectifying meeting.

Secondly, the formation of an artistic political space in which European viewers encounter refugees is challenging due to the political status of refugees. In his essay “Beyond Human Rights” (1996), Giorgio Agamben has made the well-known declaration that the refugee presents the very instantiation of naked life, of bare life stripped of political inscription insofar as the refugee exists outside of the nation state. For Agamben (1996, 1998), the (highly generalized) figure of the refugee is an important figure of our political history: through the figure of the refugee, we may countenance new ways of political belonging and political community in the future. New ways, that is, beyond the sovereign nation.

It is, however, challenging to envisage the arrival of such new ways of political belonging for refugees who currently live a bare life as non-citizens without rights. As TJ Demos puts it: “The figure of the refugee, when regarded as the point for departure for the conception of a new postnational subject, demands an answer to the question of rights ‘beyond human rights,’ which have proved inextricably linked to the nation state an thus inescapable of bearing meaningful relation to those who live outside of it” (74). When it comes to the formation of a new political
community (or merely demanding an answer to the exclusion from rights), the rightlessness of refugees stands in the way. This is why Peter Nyers points out that the activism of the refugee represents an “impossible activism” precisely because the refugee is not a political subject (they are non-citizens) and have no right to a speaking position (Nyers 1080). The same could be said on the idea of art as an agonistic political space: how to include subjects into such a space who cannot be represented politically, who do not have a political voice? In the years after Agamben published his influential essay, many theorists have searched for modes and moments by which political agency can nevertheless be carved out for refugees, and ways in which refugees can still be thought of as part of (political) communities. The two works of art I will discuss below are involved in the same search.

2. **Friday Table: An Empathic Encounter with Absence**

In the middle of a room, a long wooden table is covered with a white table-cloth. The table is set, so it seems, with plates. Yet, when approaching *Friday Table* in the gallery room, most of the plates turn out to be only outlines of plates, dotted circles indicating dinner service. Within each circle, a name is printed in a bold black font. Smaller texts printed on the table cloth provide information with each of the plates: name, date and place of birth, and next of kin. Dina, for instance, was born in 1988 in Damascus, is single, the daughter of Souma and sister of Ahmad. Lana, across the table, is married to Ahmad. She is a mother of two children whose names (Jad and Yara) are printed in the two smallest circles on the table. Even though only first names are given, we can presume that these people share a family name, as all of the 17 persons named and described turn out to be related by kinship. These kinship ties are confirmed all the more by the fact that family photographs are projected on the table, over the plates and texts, covering the cloth with yet another layer of information, a layer that binds the family members by projecting a string of family events on the white linen, weddings, birthday parties, family trips and holidays. In between the plates, moreover, a graphic pattern of lines connects many of the plates on the table to larger
dots in the middle. In combination with the texts and photographs, it is not unreasonable to assume that these lines indicate a family tree.

However, instead of representing the bonds of kinship that tie a family together, the branched maze of lines points out the dispersion of a family. With the exception of Grandma Salma, who was born in Belgrade, all family members were born in Damascus, Syria. However, the graphs on the table reveal that most of them have left. While Ghalia already emigrated in 1999, most family members departed after the Arab Spring protests that marked the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. The dots and lines on the table turn out to be a map of flight routes, from Damascus to Zatari Refugee Camp in Jordan, to Cairo, Dubai, or Abu Dhabi. Most lines come together on the left side of the table, where the names of European cities are printed next to a group of black dots: Aachen, Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam. Viewers of the installation can read the current location of all family members on the table cloth. Most of them have arrived in a city or refugee camp outside of Syria, yet some of them are missing. In addition, two of them have been arrested, and two of the grandparents are deceased. Only Mazen, Dunia and Souma are still living in Damascus today, according to the texts on the table cloth. Their names are the only ones that are printed onto real porcelain plates instead of dotted circles. Yet in spite of the fact that the location of these three family members is Damascus, they are —like all the other family members— absent from the dinner table.

The fact that the installation is titled *Friday* table is meaningful in this regard. Although the religion of the family is not mentioned, this particular day of the week has specific connotations in both Christianity and Islam. In combination with a dinner table, “Friday” brings the Passion of Christ to mind. The last supper took place on a Thursday. On Friday —the day of calvary and execution— the table was empty, like in Foundland’s installation. “Good Friday” is a day of mourning. In Islam, Friday is regarded as an important day of the week on which it is common to read Chapter 18 from the *Qur’an* in congregational prayer. This chapter is titled “The Cave” (“Al-Kahf”), and narrates the story of a couple of youngsters who fled to a cave in the mountains to escape persecution.
In spite of these references to flight and dispersion, the visitor of *Friday Table* is not invited to empathize with the fate of the family members in a direct, sentimental manner. As viewers, we do not get to know the precise stories of Lana, Yassin, or Grandma Insaf; we do not learn why Hani was arrested or how Latifa is doing in the refugee camp. The texts inform us how the family members got to their current location: modes of transportation are neatly listed on the table cloth. Yet apart from our general knowledge of the Syrian war, we do not know why they fled, or what horrors they endured as refugees. The suffering, persecution and loss that is suggested by the title of the piece is not affirmed by characters displaying the fear, sadness and mourning one might expect. Although the family pictures presumably show us the faces of the family members, we cannot attach the individual faces to any of the names, nor do they reveal any of the emotions we would associate with fleeing from war. Emotional identification with the represented family members is therefore obstructed. Crude empathy with the 14 refugees named on the table cloth is not enabled by this work of art, as there are simply no emotions on display that the viewer could “assimilate to the self in the most sentimental way” (Bennett 111).

Nevertheless, the installation produces an empathic encounter in an intricate manner. It does not so much allow the spectator to “meet” or come closer to the (cultural, migratory) other, or to inhabit the space between self and other, as Bennett defined her managed form of empathy. *Friday Table* rather arranges for the viewer to encounter the absence of the other: the not-being-there of the refugees. The maps on the table indicate both spatial and temporal movement away from the table; most of the family members fled from the city of Damascus where the Friday dinner table was set in the past. Their bodies have been reduced to crucifixes, dots and question marks on the table cloth, indicating their decease, presumed relocation elsewhere or unknown whereabouts.

However, although the family members are thus still signified by the graphs on the table, at the same time, these marks make clear that the family is not present at the table anymore. In addition, the physical absence of the family members is all the more emphasized by the fact that most of the objects we need in order to have dinner at a table are absent as
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well; not only are most of the plates missing, there is no cutlery and the chairs are missing too. The visitor of *Friday Table* can physically move into the places where family members used to sit down in the past. While standing in front of the circles that outline the past position of people’s dinner plates, the spectator becomes a temporary stand-in for those who have left, not by identifying with characters, or by feeling into the bodies of these other persons, but by standing in their voids. This does not imply that the spectator is enabled to fully empathize with those who fled. Rather, the difference between self and other can be felt through this negative representation of refugees: the difference between, on the one hand, the viewer who is present in the here and now, standing at a table that was once surrounded by a large family, and, on the other hand, the family members who were seated together in the past but had to move away, leaving lacunae at a shared table. Insofar as the space between self and other is inhabited (as Bennett would have it), this space can only be envisaged negatively, as a hole left by an absent other, as a gap between then and now, neither of which can be filled or bridged by the presence of the spectator.

With regards to this process in which becoming a stand-in produces an affective encounter with the absence of the refugees that *Friday Table* refers to, it is important that the visitor of the installation cannot sit down. Standing in for the family members is restrained as the viewer can quite literally only stand in for them. The installation allows its audience to occupy empty spaces at the dinner table, yet it hinders a too close imitation of a family dinner. This way, the installation keeps the spectator from indulging in overidentification with the family members. The viewer can experience that they are not there anymore but is not enabled to assimilate their experiences to the self.

**That’s Me / That Has Been / They Have Left**

The intermedial character of the installation further sustains *Friday Table*’s restraint on identification. The medium of photography draws the viewer into the familial structure, yet only up to a certain point. The family pictures projected on the table cloth invite to idiopathic identification at first. They show well-known family gatherings, as well as
familiar emotions: parties and holidays, smiles and the occasional awkward face. For most viewers, it is not difficult to relate to the depicted situations or to empathize with the people on display. As the pictures follow the conventions of family photography so closely, we can presume that they resemble the family albums of many spectators, as well as their memories shaped by these albums. Therefore, the photographed others can, to a certain extent, be assimilated to the self in a simplistic way, on the basis of a projected likeness: we are the same, that is (like) me.

The appropriating or “cannibalistic” edge of this form of crude empathy, as Bennett would call it, has an upside when it comes to Friday Table. Given the fact that Foundland’s piece has exclusively been exhibited in Western countries (Europe and the USA), the series of photographs of a Syrian family could possibly give rise to a detached investigative gaze, searching for difference. Some of the formal conventions of the family photographs, such as the group portraits in which large numbers of people are lined up in front of the lens, are reminiscent of early twentieth-century anthropological projects in which cultural others were captured with the camera, in order to map, archive, measure and research essentially different “primitive peoples.” The family that is shown on the installation’s table cloth, however, cannot easily be regarded as an object of study by Western viewers as the represented subjects can hardly be recognized as non-Western cultural others. The looks, clothing, activities and poses shown by the photographs do not form an archive of Oriental otherness for European or American viewers, but rather provide an already familiar overview of outdated fashion styles in faded colors. Hence, the appropriating empathy that springs from likeness overthrows another form of appropriation when looking at Friday Table: an objectifying, scrutinizing mode of looking.

The viewer of the installation is further woven into the family by way of looks as well as touch. In Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory, Marianne Hirsh wonders how the impenetrable façade of family photographs can be entered. How can viewers who stand outside the familial network access or read the domestic space on family pictures? (2, 4). According to Hirsh, familial subjectivity is constructed relationally, and one manner in which the
individual subject is constituted in the space of the family is through looking, by looking at family members and being looked at in return (9). As Hirsh explains, “these constitutive optical relations are often concealed and unacknowledged. We have no easy access to these nonverbal exchanges which nevertheless shape and reshape who we are” (9). However, as the author in question demonstrates in her book, family photographs might give insight into a family’s dynamics or psychological layers when we read domestic images and family photographs as records of these processes.

In her analyses, Hirsh emphasizes that the viewer/reader of family photographs does not remain a detached outsider when reading family pictures. Inside the frame, family members are related by way of interfamilial looks as well as by touch: connections are, for instance, made visible by holding hands, standing shoulder to shoulder or sitting on laps. However, the viewer outside the frame becomes part of these familial exchanges. First of all, the viewer is not only looking but is also looked at by the depicted people, as one of the dominant posing conventions of family photographs is that the subjects in front of the camera look into the lens, to the photographer and to viewers in the future. In addition, it is possible to argue that viewers are physically touched by photographed family members. For the photo is, in Roland Barthes’s terms, a carnal medium, connecting all those who look at it with the living person who stood in front of the camera in the past: “From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photographs of the missing being will touch me like the delayed rays of a star” (81).

On the one hand, Friday Table enhances the impression of being touched by rays of light that proceed from the represented subjects, as the projected photographs in the installation are made of light that visibly reflects from the table onto the face of the spectator. On the other hand, the closeness that is produced by what we could call a carnal indexical relation between viewer and represented family members is curbed by the fact that the people in these pictures are so blatantly missing. This missing could be said to be a part of every photograph. For Barthes, the essence of photography, its noeme, is the “That-has-been.” Whatever is shown on a
photograph belongs irrevocably to the past. In *Friday Table*, the that-has-been of the photographs is made all the more poignant as the other parts of the installation (the graphs and maps as well as the set-up of the table without chairs) all point out the absence of the family members from a time *and* place where they have been together once.

In addition, the façades of the family pictures in the installation remain impenetrable as the pace of the projection limits viewing time. Each photograph is rapidly succeeded by the next, turning the represented family members into passers-by who disappear before the visitor can have a proper look at them. The ongoing movement of the photographs, as well as the holidays they show, mimic the patterns on the table that also indicate that this family is and always has been on the move. Without sufficient time to identify the passing projected family members and their kinship relations, let alone to read the interfamilial looks for clues on psychological layers and family narratives, the family’s structure remains to a large extent inaccessible to the spectator. The pictures are not revealing, and there is no one around (the table anymore) to tell the stories. As a result, the installation confines the impressions of likeness and belonging it initially produces in its viewer. Crude empathy is remolded into a managed form of empathy. The spectator can identify with the depicted family through likeness, momentarily feel “with” them when seeing their happy moments or experience physical proximity when being touched by their looks or their photographic traces. Yet in the end, the installation excludes the spectator from the familial space. This confronts the viewer with the result of flight. She cannot be with or feel part of this familiar family, because they have left.

**From Empathy to Empowerment**

How does this contained or managed form of empathy lead to critical thinking or understanding of the refugee crisis? Is *Friday Table* able to carve out political agency for those who are not around to tell their stories, for the family members whom the viewer draws near but keeps missing? First of all, the graphs on the table can be seen as a documentation of flight routes from Syria. Together with the textual information on modes of transport, they provide unsentimental insight into how Syrians families
flee from their country. The causes for leaving are not shown or mentioned though, and the horror of war and of taking refuge are left out. The installation depicts the emptiness, the void that is left upon leaving, yet does not portray the mourning that may accompany this process of leaving behind. Because of this, the family members are not portrayed as victims. They cannot be empathized with on the basis of pity and sympathy.

This brings me to the second manner in which Friday Table can lead to critical thinking by managing empathy. The installation can be understood as a critical reflection on the dominant representation of refugees as helpless others. In Friday Table, taking flight is to a large extent represented as a choice. Some of the family members chose to stay, others have left. In addition to information on dates of departure and modes of transportation, each of the text frames accompanying the plates contains the caption “Plans to Leave.” Some of the family members do not have plans, others do. In any case, leaving is presented as a planned action, not a passive event the refugees suffer through without agency.

Therefore, Friday Table is in concord with theorists such as Dan Bousfield and Fiona Terry who argue that refugees are actors that make choices about mobility like everyone else (Bousfield 5). As Terry points out in her discussion of the Arabic term mohajir, flight can be seen as a positive experience of agency rather than an abject source of exclusion (76). As she points out: “A mohajir is a person who voluntarily takes exile and has severed ties with relatives and possessions, thus denoting courage for sacrificing comfort and family, rather than shame at taking flight” (76). Terry’s conceptualization of the mohajir is grounded in the idea that flight is an empowering tactic, rather than a disempowering expulsion. Although Foundland’s installation does represent flight as a positive experience, the family members are shown to have agency with regards to the matter of leaving.

This agency is further sustained by the fact that the installation points out the mobility of family members long before the civil war: Grandma Salma was born in Belgrade but moved from Yugoslavia to Syria, Chalia left for Cairo twelve years before the Arab Spring, and the projected family pictures and occasional postcard prove that the family
has travelled for decades. As Bousfield has argued, the fact that migration and mobility have in general taken place throughout history is often overlooked: “Rather than seeing it as the exception, it should be treated as a norm that emphasizes the mobility and agency of the one seeking refuge” (15). *Friday Table* suggests the same thing. The installation arranges an intimate encounter with the absence and dispersion of a family, yet the fact that something is left behind empty does not mean the family is lost altogether. The weekly family dinners have ended. However, as the family in question proves to have been mobile throughout time, family history is actively continued after, but more importantly, *through* taking flight.

### 3. *Ten Thousand Waves:* Moving Screens

Isaac Julien’s nine-screen video installation *Ten Thousand Waves* interweaves several media as well as several stories. The main story concerns 23 Chinese immigrants, who drowned in 2004 while working as clandestine cockle-fishers because they were unfamiliar with the rapidly rising tides in Morecambe Bay near Lancaster, UK. However, although this tragedy is central to the meaning and affect of the installation, it is not expounded on. It is told in a short and sober manner, by way of archival video footage of the rescue operation that is projected onto nine large screens that form an oval, with two screens placed in the middle. As a consequence, the viewer of the installation is surrounded by nine stretches of moving, foaming water which can never be seen all at once. While the police officers report from their helicopter how they can only recover one person, and while the camera on a rescue boat keeps scanning the rolling waves, the spectator is spurred to move, to turn from screen to screen, in order to join the search in the dark blur of grainy water. The viewfinder of the video camera that focuses on possible signs of life indicates a frantic air-sea rescue, but also carries the association of the controlling gaze of night-vision surveillance cameras that are used on border patrols at sea. The objects of this gaze can therefore be understood both as victims in distress and as unwanted intruders. Later on in *Ten Thousand Waves*, handheld images of Morecambe Bay by daylight show deserted sandbanks
and vast expanses of water. Like the rescue boat, the beach remains empty. The cockle-fishers are nowhere to be found. Moreover, their names, personal histories, voices and emotions are not revealed by the installation.

The Morecambe bay tragedy is embedded into two other stories. The first one is a Chinese myth about the goddess Mazu, who saves drowning, shipwrecked fishermen and escorts them to a beautiful, pristine Chinese island. The medium by which Ten Thousand Waves re-tells this age-old myth, however, is not as old as the “Tale of Yishan Island” itself. The installation narrates the story of Mazu through cinematic means: by way of high resolution moving images, as well as narrative film conventions. Secondly, Ten Thousand Waves imitates parts of the classic Chinese movie The Goddess (Yonggang 1934), which tells the story of an unnamed prostitute who walks the streets at night in order to provide for her son. The latter narrative seems far removed from the theme of drowning refugees from China in front of the British coast, yet it is in fact key in shaping the relation between the viewer and the represented refugees, as well as between Chinese refugees and a broader historical, economic and social Chinese context that is at the root of flight from China to the West. I will therefore turn to this story first.

**Blocked Views, Excluded Viewers**

The story of The Goddess is copied only partially by Julien’s installation. In Yonggang’s film, the prostitute falls prey to an evil male gambler, who first helps her to hide from the police, but then considers her to be his property. Ten Thousand Waves most comprehensively mimics scenes from The Goddess in which the prostitute is walking the streets at night, and travels through the old city during the day. In Ten Thousand Waves, however, these scenes are not embedded in a story about blackmail and murder. The woman isn’t robbed, chased, laughed at or scolded in Julien’s installation. She is looked at though. As a prostitute, she is gazed upon – visually inspected, so to speak – by male passers-by who occasionally pick her up. These male gazes can be witnessed within the frame, when the prostitute is shown with men in a single shot. However, she also becomes the object of the male gaze through the cinematic procedure of
suture. Although *Ten Thousand Waves* uses this cinematic narrative form of the shot/reverse angle shot in order to create so-called eye line matches that bind images of the female character to shots of the looking men, the installation seems to protect the female protagonist from an objectifying gaze in two ways.

First, the sutures between shots and reverse shots are not tight in *Ten Thousand Waves*. Like many cinematic video installations, *Ten Thousand Waves* sutures images spatially instead of temporally. The videomatic set-up of the multi-screen installation offers artists and filmmakers the possibility to attach the look of characters to opposing screens. Instead of being stitched to a temporally preceding or succeeding shot on the same screen, their gaze is sutured to another screen; the screen they seem to be looking at in the exhibition space. When the technique is employed in relation to the prostitute, however, the male gazes that rest upon her seem to “misfire.” Because the match between their gaze and the female protagonist depends both on the position of the spectator in front of the screens, as well as on the precise angle between screens, the men in *Ten Thousand Waves* often seem to look slightly past instead of at the prostitute when they do not reside in the same frame. These “missutures” not only protect the prostitute from the male gazes within the diegesis; they also disable the installation’s viewer from looking at her as an object of desire. As sutures forcefully invite film viewers to share the looking character’s point of view, the visitors of *Ten Thousand Waves* will look past the prostitute if they adopt the gaze of her male onlookers. In this respect, the installation hinders the viewer.

*Ten Thousand Waves* blocks an appropriating look in yet another way. Although the prostitute mostly appears in bright, sharp and smooth cinematic looking images of a high quality, they are occasionally drastically out of focus. The result of the blurred opaqueness is that the female protagonist is hardly visible anymore. Whereas the projected images first invite the viewer to plunge visually into the depth of the illusionistic spaces on screen, they cast the viewer out as soon as the images are out of focus. The depicted prostitute can no longer be mastered or appropriated with the eyes. This is not only relevant in relation to the male gaze; it is also a significant strategy when it comes to the occidental
gaze. With the exception of one show in Shanghai, *Ten Thousand Ways* has been exhibited in Western countries alone. The resulting Western point of view holds the risk of being orientalist in the contemplation of Julien’s installation which, very basically, is “about” China – or, to put it slightly less narrowly: about China’s social, political, and economic history and the resulting Chinese migration to the West. The haptic, opaque image surface disables the Western viewer from visually obtaining the oriental other.

However, the opacification of the screen has a paradoxical dimension. On the one hand, the screen protects the female protagonist by problematizing visual access to her. On the other hand, the impenetrable screen reinforces that category of the “other.” It sets up a boundary between the presumably occidental viewer and the oriental other on screen. This exclusion of the occidental viewer, and inclusion of the oriental subject, is established through a couple of other features of *Ten Thousand Waves*. First of all, the reference to the Chinese film classic in itself creates insiders and outsiders. For many Chinese film viewers, the reference will be obvious. *The Goddess* was a very popular movie, and has recently received new critical attention and acclaim in China as a valuable social document that exposes problems of the impoverished working class in early twentieth-century China. For Western viewers, Yonggang’s film is less likely to be a part of their cultural frame of reference. Therefore, they might completely miss the installation’s resemblance to *The Goddess*.

The occidental viewer who does not recognize the imitation of the film classic will, however, nevertheless feel excluded from and by the story of the unnamed prostitute because her Mandarin monologues are not subtitled. In addition to the woman’s speech, the installation shows many close-ups of Chinese characters which are unintelligible to most members of an occidental audience. Notably, some of them are written on the surface of the screen by a Chinese calligrapher. The large sweeps of ink drip down on what now seems to function as a besmeared window between the exhibition space in which the viewer resides and the represented on-screen space in which the calligrapher is painting his human-sized signs. Like the opaqueness of the blurred images, these large
written ideograms instill a cleavage between the viewer and the “foreigner.” Only now, the boundary is produced by a presumably illegible sign, a sign of alterity itself.

**Travelling along, to the Present**

In spite of these modes of excluding the occidental spectator, the viewer is also included into the onscreen world by sequences showing the prostitute and is led to the contemporary story of the drowned refugees. The blurred and smeared boundaries which *Ten Thousand Waves* occasionally creates between the space of the beholder and the illusionistic space on screen are not permanent. The represented space on the screens fuses with, or expands into, the space between the screens. One of the most poignant examples of this occurs in a scene in which the unnamed prostitute travels through the old city by tram. Whereas the carriage would have to be mapped out by successive shots and reverse shots in a conventional single screen movie, *Ten Thousand Waves* forms the interior of a tram by way of several, simultaneously projected images in the exhibition space. Six of the installation’s screens roughly form a rectangle which resembles a tram in both size and shape. Each screen, then, shows a part of the tram: at the front, we see how the tram driver navigates the streetcar through traffic, while the screen at the back of the rectangle shows how the buildings and people in the streets disappear in the distance as the tram continues on its way through town. On the screens which form the sides of the tram, passengers sit on their benches. Although the female protagonist seems to sit alternately on each side of the tram, we see how she travels through the city while powdering her nose or staring out of the window. Her staring gaze is never sutured in the installation. Therefore, as a viewer, you cannot adopt her point of view. In this sense, the depicted woman remains an inaccessible other: viewers are not invited to identify with her. However, the visitor of *Ten Thousand Waves* occasionally invited into her world, as the installation offers its viewer the impression of traveling along with her, in the tramcar, through town, but also through time.

As the installation suggests, the unnamed prostitute appears to move forward through time. First, she seems to belong to the 1930s. However, as she rides the tram through the old-looking city, the cityscape
is suddenly exposed as a film set. The architectural surroundings of the prostitute/actress turn highly modern as her storyline in *Ten Thousand Waves* progresses. She is depicted in what seems to be the contemporary interior of a high-class restaurant or luxurious hotel lobby. In addition, we see her staring out of the window of a hotel room, which offers a magnificent view over Pudong’s skyscrapers. Here, the staring gaze of the woman attaches her to another story – precisely because the gaze itself hardly ever attaches itself to anything. The prostitute (or actress) keeps staring into the distance as if she were longingly thinking of someone who is not there. So who is she thinking of?

In *The Goddess*, the prostitute was separated from her son. Given the installation’s initial resemblances with this early film classic, it seems obvious to suspect that the sad female protagonist might be missing her son. The installation confirms this presumption when shots of the staring actress/prostitute in the modern interior are alternated with shots from a video documentary on the Morecambe Bay victims. These show how an older family member, presumably a parent, of one of the drowned immigrants lays out some of the victim’s personal belongings on a blanket and folds up some clothes of the deceased relative. Whereas the conventional documentary from which these images are sampled focused more on depicting the emotions and background of this relative, the installation merely shows a video image of two hands holding a photograph of one of the drowned young men. Although the photograph is clearly not held by the prostitute, the fact that her image is juxtaposed with this shot strongly implies that she is missing a son, too. However, the fact that the picture of the drowned man is shown by way of video embeds the “that-has-been” of the photograph into the “now” of what Thomas Y. Levin has termed video’s temporal indexicality: through their possible liveness, video images always point to the present (583). In addition, the reality effect of the video documentary images further questions the presumed fictionality of the prostitute’s cinematic story. This photographed man is really dead, right now. And the character of the prostitute is related to the reality of this moment in the present.

This presentness is further sustained when images of the female protagonist are mixed with video footage that has an even stronger
temporal indexicality: surveillance video footage of the rescue operation at Morecambe Bay. The genre of surveillance video is strongly associated with live feed. When images of the prostitute are mixed with these images (including the audio recording of a panicking woman begging for help), the story of the female character can no longer be seen apart from present tragedies involving Chinese refugees. While the nine screens of the installation are filled with images of traffic circling on an incredibly complex cloverleaf between high rises, a staccato female voice rapidly recites one of the poems Chinese poet Wang Ping contributed to Julien’s piece:

We know the tolls: 23 – Rochaway, NY; 58 – Dover, England;
18 – Shenzen; 25 – South Korea and many more.

We know the methods: walk, swim, fly, metal container,
back of a lorry, ship’s hold.

We know how they died: starved, raped, dehydrated, drowned, suffocated,
homesick, heartsick, worked to death, working to death.

We know we may end up in the same boat.

In the Same Boat

By creating a relationship between Yonggang’s film classic and migratory tragedies which are pointed out by poems like this one, as well as by contemporary video footage of the Morecambe Bay tragedy, *Ten Thousand Waves* seems to suggest that the problems of China’s working class are not new. In the 1930s, poverty ripped families apart as it (for instance) forced mothers to prostitute themselves and distance themselves from their children. In the twenty-first century, after the Cultural Revolution, family members risk their lives trying to cross the ocean in order to escape the poor living situation under China’s authoritarian capitalism – only to enter into poor circumstances again in the capitalist West. While pointing a finger at China’s capitalism by accompanying shots of modern Chinese streets with a thundering voice declaring that “we live in a capitalist world,” Julien’s installation also points back in time even further when it comes to the problems of China’s poor working class by relating the Morecambe Bay tragedy to the myth of Mazu. By
representing this myth on jeopardized fishermen in need of help, which dates back to centuries before the Ming dynasty, Julien’s installation indicates that “working to death” (or at least nearly to death) has had a long history in China.

The political, historical and economic perspective that Ten Thousand Waves offers on Chinese (forced) migration to Western countries gains force in combination with a specific empathic mode of looking that is enabled by the installation. The low-resolution and hand-held video footage that signals the contemporariness of Ten Thousand Waves’s stories, also produces an embodied mode of viewing which shapes the way in which the spectator can relate to the Chinese refugees. Viewers do not get to know their names, to see their fear, or hear their individual stories. Crude empathy and sentimental identification are therefore discouraged. Yet, the installation enables a form of “feeling in” the refugee experience that is mediated through bodily affect. For when the nine screens of the installation are filled with rapidly moving grey video pixels and black surging waves, the viewer loses the ground under her feet. Without a horizon or recognizable point of orientation, the spectator of Julien’s installation is likely to feel lost and disoriented in between the screens. Previously, I described how the piece does not enable its spectator to identify with the character of the prostitute through the conventional film strategy of suture, because her point of view is not made accessible or visible to the viewer. However, the viewer is occasionally offered the possibility of seemingly traveling along with her, to accompany her in the tram, for instance. The same goes for the video footage of the rescue operation. The high angle from which most of the surveillance images are recorded indicates that they do not represent the immigrants’ point of view. However, their disorienting effect enables the viewer to share the experience of the immigrants to some extent. This goes for the particular Chinese men who were lost at sea in Morecambe Bay, but can also be understood in a more general sense; the experience of refugees is often described in terms of disorientation and being lost.

The installation’s devices of exclusion can be regarded in this light as well. When the high-quality cinematic images in the installation occasionally opacify and turn haptic, this change from cinematic image
qualities to video-specific features excludes the viewer from the depicted world and puts up a boundary between the viewer and the represented other. This visual exclusion of the viewer from the world on view can in itself be understood as an act that makes the viewer more like the other: similar to migrants in a strange country, the viewer is not allowed to visually enter the onscreen world. This exclusion is, of course, strongest in the case of Western viewers, who are not only excluded by the impermeability of the videomatic image surface, but who are also left in the dark when it comes to the spoken and written Chinese signs. Moreover, in addition to the fact that the Mandarin language is incomprehensible to the Western spectator, the viewer may be unable to grasp the installation’s culturally specific cinematic references. Precisely because the installation is so often unreadable and visually opaque, the viewer cannot forget her own position as a viewer standing between screens. As a result, the viewer will, to some extent, experience a few of the most dominant negative feelings that can accompany migration, yet without losing awareness of her own position in time and space, both on a small scale (the museum) and a larger cultural-political global scale (Europe, the West).

At the beginning of this essay, I contrasted *Friday Table* and *Ten Thousand Waves* with *The Asylum Search Machine*, an installation that promises (yet fails to provide) full access to the refugee experience by leading the visitor through an artificial multi-medial décor that inadequately mimics the circumstances of taking flight. My analyses have demonstrated that *Friday Table* and *Ten Thousand Waves* are not merely the opposite of *The Asylum Search Machine* because they hinder and problematize rather than invite to identification with refugees: it is precisely by obstructing and dosing empathy, by partially excluding the spectator from represented worlds and events, that *Friday Table* and *Ten Thousand Waves* manage to construct empathic encounters with refugee experiences. Encounters, that is, in which the depicted refugees cannot be appropriated or victimized by the onlooker, and in which the viewer is invited to reflect on her own cultural-political position vis-à-vis the represented human subjects who fled from their own homelands. Whereas Žižek declared the insufficiency of empathy in his call for a political
analysis of both the roots and routes of the current refugee flow to Europe, the installations by Foundland and Julien prove that such an analysis may very well be instigated by managed forms of empathy that acknowledge instead of obliterate differences, and that maintain a distance while approaching refugee experiences. Because of Friday Table’s intermedial set up, the viewer’s presence cannot fill, but only meet, the voids left at an empty dinner table due to a family’s flight abroad. And through Ten Thousand Waves’s specific intermedial combination of film and video features, we may briefly end up in the same boat as the depicted refugees, by being thrown out at the same time.

Notes:

i Humanity House Museum, the Hague, the Netherlands, April-December 2016.
ii See for instance the platform Remapping Europe: A Remix Project Highlighting the Migrant’s Perspective. Comprising a website, books and an online database of film and media art, this project brings together many contemporary works of art that provide insight into the experiences of refugees and displaced people. See www.remappingeurope.com and Remapping Europe – Migrants, Media, Representation, Imagery (Paulissen et al. 2014).
iii www.humanityhouse.org.
iv While writing this article, the division of Europe came to mean more than political dissent between European nations or between political parties within those nations. After a referendum on Thursday, 23 June 2016, we learned that the UK will leave the European Union.
v Foundland Collective is an art, design and research collective, initiated in 2009 by Lauren Alexander and Ghalia Elsrakbi and based between Cairo and Amsterdam.
vi Because emotions are intensely subjective, in Arendt’s view, they work to impose their singular perspective on politics, holding plurality hostage to the particularities of subjective experience (see Johannes Lang, “Hannah Arendt and the Political Dangers of Emotion,” 2015).
vii With Bennett’s differentiation between “crude empathy” and managed forms of empathic encounters in mind, we can of course add to Clohesy’s remark that it is important to realize that empathy can acknowledge and tolerate but also overlook and assimilate differences.
viii For a more extensive discussion of the violent features of lens-based media, see Film and Video Intermediality: The Question of Medium Specificity in Contemporary Moving Images (Houwen, forthcoming with Bloomsbury, 2017).
ix I am partially following a paraphrase of Agamben from T.J. Demos (74).
x Agamben’s view on the refugee as a valuable figure pointing beyond the sovereign nation is not reflected in dominant public discourses in Europe (most
notably those surrounding Brexit), in which the refugee figure has come to stand in opposition to national sovereignty.

As paraphrased by Nick Bousfield in “The Logic of Sovereignty and the Agency of the Refugee” (4).

Ideas on this matter range from propositions to fully embrace bare life in order to demonstrate the violence inflicted by state power (e.g. Pugliese 2002, Edkins and Pin-Fat 2004 following Agamben 1996) to calls for the repudiation of bare life and the formation of communities around resistance to injustice (Owens 2009, Bousfield 2005).

In an interview with Nat Muller (2014), Foundland’s Lauren Alexander and Ghalia Elsrakbi explained that the names on the table in fact refer to family members of Elsrakbi. This is not revealed explicitly at the installation site itself. However, it is suggested by the fact that Elsrakbi’s first name is in one of the drawn plates.

The German term for Good Friday is Karfreitag: Freitag for Friday, Kar from kara: “bewailing,” “mourning,” “grieving.”

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Us and Them: A Vision of Heroes on the Move in 
John McGahern’s Fiction

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Abstract
Current explorations of migration in fiction focus on innovative perspectives, linking memory and trauma with the concepts of exile and conflict. Personal memories ask for an understanding of what belonging and identity represent for the Irish; immigration has hybrid and fertile links to memory studies, psychology and psychoanalysis (Akhtar), making the immigrant both love and hate his new territory, while returning to the past or homeland to reflect and regain emotional balance. From the focus on ‘the sexy foreigner’ (Beltsiou), we rely on the idea of crisis discussed by León Grinberg and Rebeca Grinberg, Frank Summers’ examination of identity, the place of the modern polis and the variations of the narrative (Phillips), the trans-generational factor (Fitzgerald and Lambkin), the departure seen as an exile (Murray and Said) and the impact of guilt (Wills).

Such views support an analysis of McGahern’s writing which works as a blend of memories and imagination, the writer highlighting dilemmas, success and failure as ongoing human threads. They are as diverse as the people met by the novelist in his youth, many of them being workers, nurses, entrepreneurs, teachers and writers, both young immigrants in search of a better life and migrants returning to spend their retirement or holidays home.

Keywords: Irishness, anxiety, exile, conflict, irony, self, guilt, identity, circularity, existence.

Introduction: traditional and hybrid views
Irish communities have been for over half a century now the heart of deep changes as a result of economic influences and people’s need to find a
more prosperous, stable living, aligning their status and changing religious options to those of the overseas nations following the post-world war era. The key to understanding this process needs to start from a preliminary examination of what migration stands for: it has been defined as “the geographical mobility of persons who move, either individually, in small groups, or in large masses and remain in their new environment for a sufficiently long time to make a home there and carry out the activities of daily living” (Grinberg and Grinberg 155), while Julia Beltisou highlights the “exciting narrative of the sexy foreigner,” claiming that it “co-exists with the painful experiences of unbelonging, non-recognition, struggle, alienation and trauma” (1). Søren Frank looks at the topic and defines it from the perspective of a migration literature emerging from the Greek antiquity and heroes such as Daedalus and Odysseus seen as individual resilient experiences implying a deep and irreversible transformation. He examines several contemporary authors, using a departure point defined as Ansatzpunkt by Erich Auerbach in the early fifties, and draws on the capacity of migration to act as a ‘synthesizer,’ relying on its ability to unite sociology and aesthetics (5-6), yet pointing out that fiction based on migration cannot be looked upon from a post-colonialist standpoint only, though this brings a valuable insight; instead, he supports a more comprehensive approach which has to extend beyond the rather euro-centric and historical context of Western Europe and find equally vibrant sources and expressions in languages and literatures other than English, German or French.

In terms of needs, migration has been seen and discussed in the last decade as a predominantly hybrid trend, linking postcolonial identity studies with memory studies, and also as a highly expressed psychological drive, since León Grinberg and Rebeca Grinberg suggest that it relates to a number of complex manifestations specific to a crisis, while observing the changes experienced by the migrant, as he becomes gradually more focused on his new life, and begins to leave behind a series of mental associations and representations:

[It] triggers different types of anxieties in the person who emigrates: separation anxiety, persecutory anxiety arising from the confrontation with the new and the unknown, depressive anxiety over loyalties and values
which give rise to mourning for objects left behind and for the lost parts of the self, and confusional anxieties arising from failure to discriminate between the old and the new. (154)

The members of his initial place of departure undergo their own transformation, and the result is a gradual detachment and increasing distance, while the departed hero remains attached to the non-human environment which remains for several years a stable source for his identity and personal reflection.

In what concerns one’s feelings and their flow in the recently shaped social and economic circumstances, Grindberg and Grindberg show that a whole series of confusional anxieties arise in the mind of the immigrant, placing him in a potentially oedipal triangular case where the hero faces two different parents, namely the two countries he relates to. He leads them to a symbolically-built space “evoking ambivalence and conflict of loyalties” (161), but that needs a highly flexible cultural toolkit, one able to shift perspective and employ a diversity of tools, such as the comparative analysis of migratory trajectories and the “continuities and discontinuities” in fiction (Frank 13).

In their analysis of this phenomenon as a robust and resilient stream in the mind, the two authors also suggest that “Paranoid anxieties can develop into true panic when the immigrant confronts the overwhelming demands that he must meet: loneliness, ignorance of the language, finding work and a place to live, etc.” (161). They think that the immigrant endures high stress in his new homeland, and that gradually “guilt takes different forms varying from the normal to the highly pathological” (162) in his effort to deal with such alienating stress. The further the new location and difference in terms of social patterns, economic prospects or cultural value, the higher and more durable becomes his endeavor to “adapt to the new conditions, struggling against confusion, and this causes him to turn again and again to dissociations” (162). The adjustment to the new place implies painful choices, from the moment the person decides to relocate his existence elsewhere; and the impact on what is coined as ‘identity’ by cultural contributors suffers equally profound transformations: “[i]n order to become integrated into the environment
where he is received, the immigrant must renounce part of his individuality, at least temporarily” (162).

What surfaces from recent contributions examining the psychoanalytical research body is the need to widen the lens of the approach, to welcome a wider and more systematic, historically and anthropologically speaking, approach to those undergoing such changes, as Frank Summers shows when he refers to its needs to “move away from the monadic theory of the mind, not only because it artificially separates person from world, but also because it disconnects the patient from a heritage that can be crucial for the formation of her identity” (2). It is not only this trans-generational element that often defines migration and identity studies, but also the process which, as Fitzgerald and Lambkin suggest, revolves around a complex trajectory: leaving, crossing and arriving or a ‘basic three-stage structure’ specific to any human journey (16).

Quoted in Tony Murray’s study on London Irish Fictions: Narrative, Diaspora and Identity, Edna O’Brien defines the departure as a separation or exile: “Writers are by nature exiles. Sometimes it’s voluntary exile. Sometimes you have to leave your own country. But in order to write about something, whatever it be, there has to be that rupture, that terrible separation, because it is in that separation that the depth and profoundness and everything else returns to one” (5). In his effort to examine the case of Irish writers present on London sites, Murray defines the framework as being heavily marked by the movement between the two backgrounds, a movement which impacts the very identity of the migrant: “migrants move between two sets of subjects who ‘stay put’, those in their place of origin and those in their place of destination,” and this finally determines the protagonist to “negotiate the often contested allegiances of diaspora space that this entails” (12).

The case of Irish immigrants definitely shares similarities with other migrations, and knows differences as well, depending on geographical conditions, the opportunities of immigrants to re-visit and re-connect with their original hometown and the guilt or shame perceived about the native culture, seen in the new context as retrograde, old-fashioned and inappropriate for survival and prosperity. In her book
devoted to the study of post-war Irish immigration, Clair Wills suggests that its representation in fiction followed a strong existentialist and realist touch, and investigates McGahern’s prose as an example of declared ‘British Palladies’ in which she immediately detects the “frustration and deprivation of Irish society” in stories about heroes leaving Ireland behind, taking the experience of abused protagonists close to French naturalism. In her view, such young and active “would-be modern young men and women” (106) are deeply connected to and correspondingly shape the cultural milieu they were extracted from “as characters [meant to] battle with the poverty of imaginative resources” (106).

Looking at the attractiveness of London sites for newcomers, Lawrence Philips explains its relatively recent newness, many of these contemporary metropolitan additions being practically produced in the last hundred years, since post-war writers were attracted by its “distinctive fabric and image” (2), observing the variations of the narrative upon the city in the works of various contemporary writers, particularly the “convergence between time and space in the city—which encompasses both the image of the city and its past” (4).

Such views support an analysis of McGahern’s writing in which we look at how fiction works as a blend of memories and imagination, the writer being interested in highlighting dilemmas, success and failure as ongoing threads of the life of his protagonists. They are as diverse as the people met by the novelist in his youth, many of them being workers, nurses, entrepreneurs, teachers and writers, both young immigrants in search of a better life and migrants returning to spend their retirement or holidays at home.

**Migration Topoi: Shaping the Past**

In their contributions to immigration studies emerging from psychological and psychoanalytic work, researchers reviewed by Salman Akhtar brought to the surface of a human’s mind an interwoven series of concepts playing a key role in John McGahern’s fiction as well, for instance the *waking screen*, discussed by Joseph Kepecs and Joseph Slap, noting the experience of a fetus perceiving a blurred reality. Bernard Pacella was to
expand the concept, observing the role of early external experience, such as smell, sounds, skin colours of significant others, type of trees and houses (Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis 306). In his studies focusing on immigrants, Akhtar nuances these implications upon a child’s early understanding, observing that “non-human elements (e.g. toys, crib, blanket, home, trees, local animals, the street on which the family lives, regional landscape, and even sounds and climate that are typical of the early environment) also contribute” in shaping his overall perception (5).

Yet migration also works as a cultural gate allowing access to knowledge, better working prospects and improved living standards. For Irish migrants in the 1950s, England was a highly detested colonial presence, and, paradoxically, the place where one could find decent work and pay. As Linda Nochlin observes in her chapter on Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation, artists also perceived it quite differently from other compatriots: “exile, at least in so far as the work is concerned, seem to be less traumatic” (Suleiman 37). In McGahern’s own words, that encounter was not seen as a source of dislocation and insatisfaction; on the contrary, he enjoyed the initial contact with the territory of great intellects: “I was absolutely amazed to set foot in England for the first time because to me this was the land of Shakespeare and Wordsworth. I would have read many English classics, and for me it was like stepping on sacred soil” (Collinge and Vernadakis 4). As Ben Forkner detects, such a move brings, from a creator’s point of view, clear benefits: a higher freedom from home-sourced limits, as well as valuable moral support and lasting friendships. In McGahern’s case, his first summer spent away did not make him return home hastily to the place where he spent his childhood while his father was a Garda officer, and he describes it with a typical humorous note:

I really was fed up of home–I didn’t want to see the barracks again. When I was well known, about fifteen years ago, a deputation came from Cootehall village, wanting me to buy the barracks and set myself up as some kind of a monument there. I told them that I had spent almost twenty years trying to get out of the place, and that I had no intention of buying my way back in. (4)
This did not impede the writer to return to his experience there time and again while living abroad for several decades; but that was a completely different mission than resetting himself in a familiar, once restricted background. After years spent away, he plainly confesses in his last volume, Memoir, that his second wife, Madelaine, fully accepted and enjoyed the idea of buying a small property in Leitrim and spend together most of their time there: “I came back to live among these lanes thirty years ago. My wife and I were beginning our life together, and we thought we could make a bare living on these small fields and I would write. It was a time when we could have settled almost anywhere, and if she had not liked the place and the people we would have moved elsewhere” (Memoir 2). This return was possible for several reasons: the distance in time helped relieving certain painful wounds and lasting conflicts; his early years in England did entail work, financial or relationship hardships, reaching a peak with McGahern’s exile because of the banning of his second novel, The Dark, in 1965, on alleged grounds of impure representations of Catholic priests, as well as the effect of his marriage with a Finnish, non-Catholic divorcee, Annikki Laaksi the same year, two elements the Catholic Church could not accept as compatible with a teaching career. Yet, in the years following the banning, once the writer was less under the impact of such difficult circumstances, and was increasingly recognized as an authentic and remarkable voice of the Anglo-Irish writing, his own rapport with the past changed, allowing him to cast a rather detached, occasionally ironic, and often realist vision of exile. After the mid-seventies, the novelist embarked on a differently-fragmented kind of life in which writing and travelling were intertwined “with stints as visiting professor or writer-in-residence at various Irish, American or Canadian universities” (McCarthy 26).

When returning to the past, environmental change and alienation are the core elements of change included in McGahern’s introductory piece to The Collected Stories published in 1992: Wheels is the title of the first story and it starts and ends with the image of rattling wheels. For the novelist, wheels turn into a highly suggestive metaphor, working along three lines of interpretation:
a) A predictable hint to the passage of time, implying a circular physical movement and the associated noise of metal wheels, suggested by the very opening line: “Grey concrete and steel and glass in the slow rain drip of the morning station, three porters pushing an empty trolley up the platform” (The Collected Stories 3);

b) A suggestion of human futility, an individual who failed to achieve something lasting or valued by companions; the clue lies in the “empty trolley up on the platform” line followed shortly by a mention about a void existence: “nothing but wait and watch and listen” (3); from this point of view, critics have noted a certain, permeable yet distinct “affirmation of McGahern’s own humanist-existentialist values and beliefs at the outset of his writing life” (McCarthy 59);

c) A rather constant immature status, the hero continues his unformed fetus-like posture despite his attempts to reject his own expected existentialist failure: “the story too close to the likeness of my own life for comfort though” but continues to laugh at his own position by taking the overheard story as a suitable conversation topic with fellows in the pub: “it’d do to please Lightfoot in the pub when I got back” (The Collected Stories 3).

On the other hand, Beltsiou practically notes that if immigration studies have benefited from a theoretical corpus built in the last couple of years, the body under scrutiny is not as clearly defined as expected by theorists, and suggests the main reason to lie in the line of generation authorship since “second-generation authors” are still perceived as creators of immigration literature (4). A secondary issue to which she points is language: is immigration literature authorship as credible and valuable if written in a non-native language by exploring the position of “a dialogue with our new culture or to the ones we left behind in our native country?” (4). Perhaps the answer is as ambivalent and ambiguous as the status of the immigrant whose identity shifts from one territory to the other.

Leaving home is painful for most heroes in Irish fiction; they perceive it as exile, endure increasing loneliness and suffer the effects of a
fragmented existence in a new urban context, where work against pay turns into an unstoppable drive. In the case of McGahern’s protagonists, such an estrangement is manifested back at home too, especially based on a long-term encounter with the Anglo-speaking world. Heroes have noted the superior, critical perspective of affluent, often middle- or upper-class members, and express their personal dissatisfaction with a direct, humorous yet serious touch: “The ignorance and boredom of the people of this part of the country is appalling, simply appalling,” Boles mimicked the English accent quietly. “That’s the speech he’ll make to Peter at the gate. A strange person” (The Collected Stories 13) is the comment made by a local to Colonel Sinclair, an absent protagonist in this story, whose name and reference suggest a rather patronizing, inflexible, unsociable individual.

The Tide That Emptied the Countryside

In McGahern’s stories depicting young workers on London building sites, several themes emerge and shape their lives: alienation, lack of education and prospects, shallow sexual satisfaction, an ongoing drive to earn one’s living in precarious working conditions, and limited social interaction. Heroes sell their long hours of work against an amount which usually allows them to return home and impress their relatives and old friends, spending lavishly what was earned after one year of toil. Their new, apparently prosperous living prospects place them in a difficult relationship with their homeland and old connections: they long for it, but hate to live there, and sometimes we have a glimpse upon a resulted fractured identity: they dislike some of their new social relationships, yet find themselves incapable of being at peace with their native space. In this context, the clash between generations, authority and domination over youth and autonomy becomes a genuine source of suffering and distress; the loss of big possessions left behind is complemented by an equally devastating case of missing small, apparently less significant items, associated with old memories, as Akthar observes: “Loss of such objects threatens to wreck the intrapsychic relationship bridges” until heroes feel “existentially naked and robbed of subjective continuity” (Immigration
and Acculturation: Mourning, Adaptation and the Next Generation 7). Moreover, members of one’s family and hometown perceive a similar emotional rupture, as they tend to look on the returns of the young generations as boastful, lacking respect, and incapable of acknowledging the contribution of their parents.

This is the very heart of such a fissure in family relationships emerging in “Gold Watch,” published in The New Yorker in 1980 and included in several collections of stories. In looking at this story, Michael C. Prusse examines the implications of a home-paid visit by a not-so-young man returning with his lover, first in Kilkenny “where she had grown up” (The Collected Stories 212), and then, a few weeks later, to his father’s house, a visit which “turned to a far worse disaster than [he] could have envisaged” (213). Prusse notes that the man returning to his father’s home claims “an old golden watch, which he remembers from the days of his boyhood” and that by doing that the young male hero takes it “as his heirloom” (3). The understanding of his gestures needs to be examined along several kinds of reading where the first layer is represented by social relationships, as we learn from the story that the old father is able of highly aggressive acts, and that the son is unable to mitigate a growing irritation between the woman who accompanies him and who is seen as an inappropriate life partner because of her age. The father becomes so ill-mannered that he voices a reproachful comment against her oldness: “What age is your intended? She looks well on her way to forty” (The Collected Stories 213). As the son does not manage to hide this offence, his female companion turns completely upset, and the man convinces her, with clear difficulty, to stay overnight. His effort to make her understand the aggression of his aging father is reflected upon as an inevitable envy upon which one needs to find his own sources of protection and mental sheltering: “You live in too many eyes—in envy or confusion or even simple admiration, it’s all the same” (214). At this point, the conflict with the elder generation forces the main protagonist to find refuge and sharpen his intellectual devices, from compliments meant to bring peace to his lover’s mind to silence and politeness used “like a single weapon” (214) against the invader, in this case the parental host. This develops the confrontation so much more difficult for the male hero,
because the father knows very well that he plays on his own territory, and
the familiarity of these surroundings allows him to burst into such
unexpected acts. In the end, when the son tries to regain his father’s
friendliness by bringing an expensive, modern watch as a peace offering,
brought to forget the battle axe, the father violently dismisses this attempt
taken as a new affront, by using it at work, hoping it will break from
violent shakes, and in the end simply drops it into “a tar barrel with water
for spraying potatoes” (224) thinking that the blue stone added that very
afternoon will ultimately ruin the device. During the night, the son goes
out into “a perfect moonlight night” and the serenity of the moment is
interrupted by his discovery of the watch in the barrel, still ticking. The
son’s inner confession, “What shocked me was that I felt neither surprise
nor shock” (225) cannot be read as a mere acceptance of the fact; the
conflict between the two figures is far from an end, and this temporarily
suspended conflict is suggested briefly by the opposition between the
silence of the moment and the dying ticking of the timepiece: “The ticking
of the watch down in the barrel was so completely muffled by the spray
that only by imagination could it be heard. A bird moved in some high
branch, but afterwards the silence was so deep it began to hurt, and the
longing grew for the bird or anything to stir again” (225).

A different side of the same issue, migrants going and returning in
the fifties, is questioned and revealed in “Oldfashioned” (included in The
Collected Stories), where we have a fresh insight into Anglo-British
relationships: the Sinclairs are a couple who give up their house in
Wimbledon, buy the old parsonage in Ardcarne and settle in a quiet, cozy
life, except their two-month regular visits to their daughter in Durham.
Although locals adjust to their presence, their lifestyle is far from
everyone else’s and that is sharply commented on: “They’re strange.
They’re different. They’re not brought up the like of use. Those hot
climates they get sent to do things to people” (252). There is a doubtful
feeling, an attitude split between tolerance and spite, partly influenced by
a genuine interest in what stands for a superior civilization; the Sinclair
couple is associated with the upper class, with refined, rather outdated
taste, and an inclination to change their current setting but not by
investing directly in locals. When speaking about Mrs Sinclair and her
unusual habit of enjoying a drink outside the bar, while the Colonel would bring her the glasses through the car window, and when asked by Charlie, the bar tender, his wife would not join a more comfortable seat in the bar; this is explained gently but firmly: “She’d not like that. Women of her generation were brought up never to set foot in bars, and the matter ended there, and though it caused a veritable hedgerow of talk for a few weeks, it provoked no laughter” (252). After the Sergeant from the barracks helps the Colonel with a gun licence formalities, the spouse appears with a “large basket of apples to the barracks” (253) and soon gets the Sergeant’s permission to have his son’s help around their garden. As the story develops, it seems that all parties get a higher interest in each other and that the boy’s work releases a silent, ongoing tension; the father almost expects this interest to grow into a more practicable, potentially productive support or result for his descendant. But the second part of the story goes into an unexpected series of attitudes and mental clashes, and, as often in McGahern’s prose, the silent pace and apparent peace of the season is not paralleled by the coming events, despite the boy’s appreciation for his host’s home: “The wheel of summer turned pleasantly. The seeds pushed above the ground, were thinned. […] Beyond the order and the luxury, what he liked best about the house was the silence” (257).

In the course of the story, we gradually learn that Irish identity relies not only on self- and group-affirmation, but also on contesting the other, in this case the British intruder settled in the local milieu. The differentiation and stubborn assertion of this identity is exposed openly through a series of dichotomic oppositions: “There was no idle speech” (257), coming from the Sinclairs, versus the insatiable “craving for news” shared by the Guard Casey and the Sergeant: “News, any news, passing like flame from mouth to eager mouth, slowly savoured in the eyes” (250); the Catholic church displaying “its stark ugliness,” compared to the beautiful stained glass “Purser windows” of the Protestant one (249); the Sinclairs travelling in their Jaguar versus the locals still using donkeys for their field work; Johnny’s inability to think about his future career when asked what kind of work he thought about when finishing school: “It depends on what comes up” triggering Colonel’s instant sarcasm: “What
do you mean by what comes up?” (257); the “surprisingly exotic plants [brought] from as far away as China and India” of the nursery farm of Rockingham House estate, as opposed to the “cows and a tractor” (265) bought by the Sergeant immediately after his resignation; Colonel’s fixation about time-keeping “which was in opposition to the casual local sense of coming and going, fining each man an hour’s pay for every fifteen minutes late” (266).

In his study upon London-focused writing and diaspora, Murray explains, while examining The Barracks and various protagonists leaving Ireland for England and returning back home for summer visits, that McGahern’s prose emphasizes “the ways in which migrant identities are configured in close if uneasy relationships between those who leave, those who stay and those who return” (96). At the end of the story, we learn that Johnny confirmed Colonel Sinclair’s and Brother Benedict’s expectations, got a scholarship to university and returned home “educated beyond [his] intelligence” (268), declares his father, and after several years spent on building sites, the young man completes a PhD and starts working for a news television station. He returns home, determined to make “a series of documentary films about the darker aspects of Irish life” (268), which equals the aim to capture a world to die, and we almost hear McGahern’s own voice commenting on his hero’s productions “bringing things to light that were in bad need of light,” despite critical voices on such a futile focus on a vanishing world.

The story shifts from difficult relationships to difficult-to-accept changes in the whole Irish society, and the narrative highlights the sweeping wave taking so many people away and the massive economic and social changes in the reshaped Irish community:

The tide that emptied the countryside more than any other since the famine has turned. Hardly anybody now goes to England. […] Most houses have a car and a colour television. The bicycles and horses, carts and traps and sidecars, have gone from the roads. A big yellow bus brings the budding scholars to school in the town, and it is no longer uncommon to go to university. The mail car is orange. Just one policeman with a squad car lives in the barracks. (269)
The narrative tone stays realist and notes with mild irony the change of the local priest, whose discourse is completely different from that of his predecessors, closely followed by the change of language for religious service, observed with a straightforward relief: “Heaven is all about us, hell is in ourselves and in one moment can be exorcised. … The altar boys kneeling in scarlet and white at the foot of the altar steps ring the bell and attend the priest, but they no longer have to learn Latin” (269). The secularization of the Catholic Church is complemented by definite changes in the living standards, often taken for improvements. The narrative voice suggests though that such changes implied a certain emotional loss too. The locals were in search of a comfortable life, close to urban standards, relieved to abandon their usual walking for miles, hard work in the fields, the familiar chat as the main socializing vehicle, or the unquestionable authority of the Church and the Garda upon all members of the community.

The Self and the Other

As Denis Sampson observes in his study of the early, formative years spent in Dublin and later in England by McGahern, the writer confessed in an interview taken in 1986 his interest in writing about real circumstances, and connecting experience with imagination in a finely-built canvas: “Everything begins as experience, how could one know anything unless one had experience? I think of writing as drawing or painting. I keep close to the way things actually happened.” This is confirmed in his prose by the very recurrent presence of the Sinclairs: mentioned by two old friends, Boles and Gillespie, who refer to him as a “strange person” or simply “[t]ouched, that’s all” (13), a Protestant, therefore a “strange coot” who seems to express through actions and words “Luther’s idea about women. The bed and the sink. As good to engage a pig in serious conversation as a woman. All candles were made to burn before the high altar of their cunts. It was no rush of faith, let me tell you good sir, that led to my conversion. I was dragged into your holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church by my male member” (14) comments Gillespie; and then a slightly rephrased fragment where the same episode is retold by the narrator in
“The Conversion of William Kirkwood” to explain rare conversions of Catholics into Protestants and even rarer vice versa, one example being “the Englishman Sinclair, who had married one of the Conways” (339). In That They May Face the Rising Sun, Jamesie Murphy tells Pat Ryan about an ambush of the Black and Tans of young rebels and a similar reference emerges from old memories: “Then they came for poor Sinclair, the Protestant, nine fields away. The Sinclairs were quiet and hardworking and they kept to themselves like all the Protestants. They knew as much about the ambush we knew” (243).

In looking critically at his compatriots, McGahern the novelist constantly shifts from sympathy to irony, from realism to a passionate *carpe diem* vision, strategies that do not necessarily exclude each other, but which work in a contradictory, thoroughly surprising manner, meant to trigger a deeper learning out of ordinary experience. In “Faith, Hope and Charity,” Cunningham and Murphy are two heroes taken from McGahern’s early, difficult years spent on London construction sites, spending their time in endless hard work for a rather low pay, but which is simply unconceivable back in Ireland, and which therefore brings a certain prospect of respectability. The two are just like many others before them, “obsessed with the idea that all knowledge lies within a woman’s body, but having entered it find themselves as ignorant as before” (146). Incapable of using their hopes in a constructive way, the two are so consumed by the anger of their personal failure, fed shortly only by their “royal summer” annual searches of new lovers, until their “full of hatred” desires change gradually yet fatally into their pull to carelessness in work routine. Their effort is once again focused on earning as much as possible, and return home to make a new “even bigger splash this summer than ever before” (146). This time, their greed fails, but the family situation generated by these circumstances takes a tragi-comic turn. Cunningham loses his life on improperly secured trenches, and the news reaches his family via a telegram. James Sharkey, the school master, accepts to deliver it to the family, but finds no one in the Cunningham house, as everyone is out at the hay, the deserted space echoing the perception over the event: “There is such stillness, stillness of death, he thought, about an empty house with all its doors open on a hot day” (148). The heat of the
day and the quiet observation of the father, “We have to do the best by him the few days more he’ll be with us” (148), are then followed by a rapid succession of events, the body being brought home in only two days and finally buried in Ardcarne. What nobody in the Cunninghams took into consideration in their effort to deal with the funeral was the repercussion of such a natural action: the family has now to cover the cost of transportation beyond their financial means. A few weeks later, the Dance Committee and the priest try to support the family to work this out, and the priest has a practical way of urging everyone to come with a solution for a money collection: “The family insisted on taking the body home. Whether it was wise or foolish it is done now and the only thing we know is that the Cunninghams can’t afford to fly a coffin home from England. The talk is that old Joe himself will have to go to England this winter to pay off the expense of the funeral. We all feel, I think, that there’s no need for that” (149). The idea is agreed, and the collection takes place at a dance party where the local band entertains the locals: “‘Faith, Hope and Charity’ were three old bachelor brothers, the Cryans, who played at local functions. They had been known as ‘Faith, Hope and Charity’ for so long that nobody now knew how their name began. Faith played the fiddle. Hope beat out the rhythm on the drums. Charity was strapped into an old accordion that was said to have come from America” (150). In this story, the dance planned to collect money results in an unusual yet necessary commemoration, illuminating a new reading of its role in traditional communities, contrasting with traditional burial rituals, yet confirming the lasting bonds with the homeland: “Emigrant wakes were more common in rural areas where the traditional funeral custom of ‘waking’ persisted and where attachments to the land was the strongest” (Fitzgerald and Lambkin 41). The attachment of the community to deliver the ritual is clear, but the expression of the need to support the family in a difficult financial context renders the dance party its tragi-comic character. Such view, as well as the critical look cast upon his fictional personae, allowed critical voices explore the novelist’s vision behind his prose as being planned “to evict history altogether and to discover a narrative form adequate to an essentially existentialist philosophy premised on the futility of the worldly struggle and on the need to
Ambivalence and ambiguity permeate stories in the *High Ground* collection as well; the story carrying the title of the volume shows a young male hero, Moran (name ascribed to several main characters in McGahern’s fiction) who is proposed by senator Reegan to become the school principal instead of the old Master, the senator being interested to make this move and get a potentially helpful ally and support a pragmatic education for his own sons, and consequently replace the stubborn old educator whose work is jeopardized because of his alcoholism. The meeting between the former student and the aging teacher who keeps on praising him reveals well-concealed feelings of the student who sees his mentor in a completely difference stance than admiration and desire to follow his footsteps: “I had once looked to him in pure infatuation, would rush to his defence against every careless whisper. He had shone like a clear star. I was in love with what I hardly dared to hope I might become. It seemed horrible now that I might come to this” (99). The old teacher’s open confession that he could not praise his own relatives is mirrored in the end by a lively discussion at the bar where Johnny Conor, a bright one too, currently working as a saw mechanic, says loudly that the “sixth class in 1933 was a great class,” which makes young Moran shiver, realizing all of a sudden that “nineteen thirty-three was the year before I was born,” an understanding which takes him much too close to the group he hardly feels he belongs to. While the voices of former students mingle in the gaily dialogue, the comment cast by the Master turns as a clearly naïve yet sincere kind of explanation for the intellectual success of the Irish: “Ye had the brains. There are people in this part of the country digging ditches who could have been engineers or doctors or judges or philosophers had they been given the opportunity” followed by the last response from the group:

Well, the people with the brains mostly stayed here. They had to. They had no choice. They didn’t go to the cities. So the brains was passed to the next generation. Then there’s the trees. There’s the water. And we’re very high up here. We’re practically at the source of the Shannon. If I had to
pick on one thing more than another, I’d put it down to that. I’d attribute it to the high ground. (103)

The story ends there, as if the narrator has to draw the curtain and leave the reader decode if the fragment mirrors his very thinking, or he simply uses a character to express a popular opinion in the post-war era. Despite the infused naivety, this remark suggests that locals tried to look at their own identity and get a better view on the why which made them think and act differently to their neighbours, the colonial Englishmen. In choosing to describe this scene, McGahern aligns himself to numerous migrant voices who need to validate a particular feeling: “Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people” (Said 177). The reclaiming and regaining territory of initial departure and subsequent return finally stands out as well-deserved success: the writer restores his place but does that on his own terms, and takes action through fiction, and not necessarily real action. His fictional universe may oppose, sometimes conflict, and ultimately make peace with his memories “through defiance and loss” (175) until it helps the author to re-establish his position in society.

Conclusions

McGahern’s stories about migrants leaving Ireland and returning home are intricately linked to the power of survival, and a simple way of living impacting many generations before. This awareness does not exclude a humorous touch, on the contrary, human experience needs humour in order to dilute subjectivity in the endless cyclical turn part of one’s life, making Lightfoot in “Wheels” voice it directly over pints of Guinness as a final comment about a fellow who failed to commit suicide because the branch he chose broke and he found himself shouting for help once down the river: “Looked at with the mind, life’s a joke; and felt, it’s a tragedy and we know cursed nothing” (The Collected Stories 3).

Heroes alternate between confrontations with their own past, often with their family members, and with the authority of dominating institutions, such as the Catholic Church and the Garda. Examples taken
from McGahern’s short stories show that issues of memory and autobiography are raised from various viewpoints, linking evidence of childhood and adulthood experience with one’s profession and social and political developments specific to generations living in the post-war Ireland. In his stories, characters are hardly heroes in the primary sense of the term; they are protagonists predominantly confronting the other, be it the Englishman, the Protestant, the father, the school master or the local priest, and sometimes failing to understand the perception of older generations who despise sheer opportunism and modern taste, even if they value family property and belongings. Working characters fail to adjust their selves to the materialist vision of a consumerist society where money can only buy cheap satisfaction, while the Irish left behind switch between their local pride upon intellect and authentic and critical knowledge versus an acceptable way of incorporating tradition into modernity. They are facets of a unique species, moving from a certain inflexibility illustrated by the novelist in an interview: “My father didn’t read or didn’t approve of writing, but he liked giving advice” (Collinge and Vernadakis 3) to a deep understanding upon change, life and family, taking characters into a revelation of their routine existence: “I felt a new life had already started to grow out of the ashes, out of the stupidity of human wishes” (The Collected Stories 28).

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Creative Pluralism in Indian and Romanian Accounts of Transnational Migration

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Abstract
The paper offers a comparative perspective on transmigrant cultural identities as illustrated in the works of two contemporary South Asian American and Romanian American authors, Jhumpa Lahiri and Aura Imbârűș. The comparison involves Gogol, a South Asian American character, and Aura, the author of the memoir Out of the Transylvania Night. Although Gogol is a fictional character and Aura is an actual transmigrant, their comparative assessment relies on the assumption that both narratives are inspired by the authors’ background of relocation. Despite their different cultural origins, both authors share thematic aspects related to the dynamics of cultural identity in the context of migration. This paper aims to provide a starting point for an enlarged framework of comparative analysis, in order to foreground intersections between different experiences of cultural negotiation in the context of displacement. Born and raised in America, Gogol is challenged by his cultural multiplicity and strives to suppress elements of his Indian identity. After years of rebelling against his parents’ norms, Gogol shifts to the Bengali model, when his father dies. Once he accepts the relevance of his cultural roots, Gogol is able to plunge into a dimension situated beyond his Bengali and American selves. His transcendent strategy is illustrated by his decision to plunge into a third space of redefinition, suggested by the Russian literature which is appreciated by Gogol’s father. Aura Imbârűș offers the example of a first generation Romanian transmigrant who undergoes voluntary relocation to the United States. Fascinated by the American world, Aura is eager to take over norms of material success and consumerism, overlooking the relevance of her cultural roots. When she undergoes a personal family crisis, Aura eventually reassesses the value of her Romanian background, aiming to reconcile her source culture with her Americanised self. In a manner similar to Gogol’s, Aura manages to integrate American norms of success,
while forging enduring bonds with the Romanian American community in California.

**Keywords:** Americanisation, borders, cultural pluralism, incompleteness, networks, relocation, transcendent, transcultural, transnational, transmigrant

**Introduction**

The paper aims to investigate the cultural evolution of South Asian American and Romanian transmigrants, as illustrated by contemporary accounts of displacement, mirrored in fictional as well as autobiographic writings. The discussion compares Gogol, a second generation character from Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel, *The Namesake*, with Aura Imbăruș, the Romanian author and protagonist of the memoir *Out of the Transylvania Night*.

An important trigger of this comparative analysis is my personal bond with the Romanian, Indian and North American cultural spaces. First, my academic expertise formed in Bucharest involves a double specialisation in English and Hindi philology. This educational training has deepened my knowledge of the English, American and Indian cultural traditions. Second, my professional background is coupled with my personal experiences of student migration to India and Canada. I am certain that my relocation to the Indian and North American spaces contributes to a comprehensive interpretation of contemporary cultural identities shaped by migration.

Although the two works belong to different literary genres, my intention to compare them is justified by the fact that these creations are inspired by the authors’ background of transnational migration. I will employ the syntagm ‘accounts of uprooting’ so as to foreground the themes of migration and culture as the main grids of interpreting the primary corpus. By comparing experiences of displacement undergone by individuals from different cultural traditions, this paper aims to retrieve common mechanisms of processing otherness that become activated irrespective of one’s cultural affiliation. By revealing intersecting...
strategies of dealing with cultural diversity, the discussion sets out to suggest the possibility of a comparative framework for filtering alterity.

Authors’ Background

Jhumpa Lahiri was born to Bengali immigrant parents in London and grew up in New England, the USA. As with most of her second-generation characters, she performed temporary relocations to India (Calcutta) in her youth. Jhumpa Lahiri experienced a great deal of confusion with respect to her cultural identity in adolescence. The author considers that she has inherited a sense of longing and loss from her parents, whose generation seems indefinitely trapped in an emotional exile (Lahiri to Farnsworth 2000; Lahiri to R. Shankar 1999). The Namesake presents the evolution of a Bengali immigrant couple (Ashoke and Ashima Ganguli) and the different strategies adopted by them and their son Gogol in navigating multiple traditions.

Aura Imbăruş was born and raised in Sibiu/ Hermannstadt, Romania, where she attended Lucian Blaga University. In 1997, she won the American visa lottery and left for the United States, eventually settling in California with her Romanian husband, Michael. At present, she is a high school teacher of philosophy, American literature and human sciences in Los Angeles. Besides her educational career, Aura is a praised writer. Her first book, Out of the Transylvania Night (2010), was considered for being shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize (Unica 2013). The first two parts of the book present Aura’s memories of her life in communist and postcommunist Romania. The third section describes her settlement in America, foregrounding her multiple relocations between Romania and America.

Theoretical Considerations

In order to account for Gogol’s and Aura’s cultural metamorphoses, the paper relies on theoretical notions regarding transnational processes and transcultural mechanisms of identity negotiation. Transnationalism is associated with an intersection of cultural patterns, described by various
terms (creolisation, syncretism, bricolage, cultural translation, hybridity) and analyzed in relation to global media and communication (Vertovec 5-6). From an anthropological perspective, transnationalism denotes “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 7). This theoretical approach redefines immigrants as transmigrants, i.e. immigrants who build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders by their engagement in networks of relationships that connect them to two or more nation states simultaneously (Basch et al. 7). This concept is meant to transcend the connotations of uprootedness inherent in immigrant dislocation. At the same time, it also aims to discard the idea of temporary residence, associated with the migrant condition (Basch et al. 4).

Considering that Gogol and Aura are involved in repeated episodes of travel between India/Romania and America, the present discussion refers to them as transmigrants, foregrounding their participation in transnational networks.

Considering that transnational mobility implies one’s contact with multiple cultural spaces, the transcultural discourse serves as a useful theoretical tool for assessing the characters’ capacity to process cultural multiplicity. The idea of cultures as self-transcendent entities is an important principle of transculturality, foregrounding the necessity to acknowledge the relevance of different cultural worlds. The transcultural approach suggests that cultural intersections involve an engagement with “differences inherent in other cultures, especially as these differences speak to gaps within the knowledge/experience base of one’s own culture” (Berry 130, my emphasis). The idea of intrinsic cultural incompleteness is an important trigger of transcultural perceptions. More specifically, the acknowledgement of missing elements from one’s set of cultural values shapes the individuals’ need to step out of their cultural sphere and adopt different cultural practices: “Perhaps the most effective way to feel difference is to embrace the feeling of one’s own incompleteness” (Epstein, After the Future 302). This notion implies the transcendence of singular, bounded or hybridized identity models into a realm situated on the border of all cultures, which is conceptualized as transculture (Epstein, Transcultural Experiments 24). Cultures as open systems stand for the
main premise of transcultural dialogues, which are made possible by the permeability of cultural borders. Starting from these premises, this paper investigates Gogol’s and Aura’s intuitions of a lack within their native cultural backgrounds that makes them aware of the potential of other cultures to enrich their own traditions. The transcultural approach envisages the achievement of cultural syntheses in terms of creative pluralism, a result of the intuition that each culture can contribute to the enrichment of others:

Transcultural pursuits should aim to understand and overcome the limitations of one’s inborn culture ... I would name such a project ‘creative pluralism’ because it does not limit itself to the simple recognition of other cultures’ integrity, but goes so far as to consider them all necessary for each other’s further development. (Epstein, *After the Future* 303)

Along with the idea of respect for cultural difference, creative pluralism also involves its incorporation that ultimately enriches one’s cultural background. This approach dismantles a separatist outlook on cultures, facilitating the occurrence of cultural transfers. Thurlow Crispin associates transculturalism with the dynamic nature of cultures, defining them as fluctuating structures. She considers that the term “transcultural” captures the unpredictable nature of cultural contacts, by denoting “a sense of moving through and across cultural systems...” (n.d., n.p.; emphasis in the original). The transcultural connotation of mobility and change can be linked with the transmigrants’ potential to create new cultural identities in the context of their accelerated mobility. Assuming a connection between transnational contexts and transcultural exchanges, Hannerz considers that the transnational ties of contemporary cultures create a sense of global interconnectedness, conceptualized as “global ecumene” (7). Defining cultural diversity as one of the “transnational commons” within the global ecumene, he advances the possibility of “creative confrontations” (Hannerz 61). The transnational connections thus defined configure the contemporary global ecumene as an open landscape in terms of social relationships and flows of culture. This transnational cultural repertoire of alternatives to bounded cultural systems shares the transgressive connotations of the transcultural
paradigm. Hence, virtually every individual placed in the global ecumene is free to associate and insert different cultural practices into his/her profile.

These theoretical considerations suggest that the transcultural and transnational fields intersect, given their common emphasis on boundary transgression. While the transcultural outlook focuses on cultural transformation, transnationalism denotes a regime of intensified mobility that facilitates one’s contact with different cultural backgrounds. Taking into account the dynamic nature of cultures and their transcendent mechanisms, along with the permeable structure of cultural borders, the following section analyses the evolution of two transmigrants who become transcultural by integrating cultural difference into their specific backgrounds.

**Creative Pluralism: A Comparative Perspective**

The condition of transnationality is an important point of intersection between the two narratives of displacement, although it is experienced differently by Gogol and Aura. The Bengali character’s transmigrant profile is configured by his family’s periodic visits to India during his childhood and teenage years. By comparison, Aura Imbărăuş’ itinerary of migration is more intensely transnational, as she maintains stronger networks of communication with Romania, by both physical and communicative travel (Larsen et al. 5). Considering this overlap in Gogol’s and Aura’s transmigrant conditions, the paper aims to demonstrate that despite their different cultural origins, they develop analogous mechanisms of cultural redefinition. More specifically, both characters seem haunted by a feeling of cultural lack meant to be filled by elements from foreign cultures. Both of them manifest the urge to repress their native traditions and refashion themselves along (predominantly) American lines. Eventually, both Gogol and Aura understand the relevance of their source culture and acknowledge its validity as a meaningful component of their identities. Their similar strategies of identity negotiation foreground their transcultural awareness that helps them transgress cultural barriers and turn their cultural plurality into a
coherent self. Aura’s and Gogol’s integration of cultural difference within their source cultures suggests that the cultural logic of identity in the global context may require culture transcendent coordinates that facilitate dialogues across cultural borders.

**Gogol Ganguli: a Bengali-American synthesis**

This discussion suggests that Gogol’s transcultural understanding is the outcome of a long oscillation between his Bengali inheritance and his self-identification as an American. Gogol’s strategy of dealing with his cultural plurality is expressed by his consistent effort to deny Bengali cultural elements, followed by his attempt to suddenly accept them.

Gogol’s initial rejection of his parents’ cultural norms is suggested by his fraught relationship with his pet name, Gogol, that reflects Ashoke’s preference for Russian literature. Gogol’s deviation from his family tradition starts in his childhood when he decides to turn his pet name (Gogol), reserved for the private sphere according to Bengali customs into a good name, which is traditionally associated with the public life of an individual. He refuses to be called Nikhil at kindergarten, deviating from the Bengali manner of employing the good name (Nikhil) in public. Later on, the character understands that his pet name (used as a good name) sets him apart in the American context. Since the name Gogol initially marks the character’s impossibility to feel included in the American space, Gogol considers his other name – Nikhil – as conducive to stronger acceptance by his American colleagues. Gogol’s decision to change his name from Gogol to Nikhil when he turns eighteen is part of his strategy to define himself as an American teenager, since the possibility of renaming oneself is “a right belonging to every American citizen” (Lahiri 99).

However, after his father’s sudden death, Gogol reconsiders his choices, attempting to retrieve his parents’ cultural meanings. As he strives to reconnect with his roots, Gogol realises that a complete return to sameness is no longer possible, as suggested by his unsuccessful marriage to Moushoumi, a second generation South Asian American like himself. After failed connections with non-Indian partners, Gogol and Moushoumi
start their relationship hoping to find solace in the comfort of their similar backgrounds. However, this bond does not last, since Moushoumi feels eventually trapped in a marriage that does not fulfil her sophisticated cultural tastes (Stoican 247). In the long run, Gogol acquires a personal understanding of how he can redefine himself by reconciling his Bengali coordinates with American ideals. More specifically, Gogol realises that a more satisfying approach to self-redefinition involves a personal ability to integrate elements of sameness and difference without privileging a particular culture. Gogol’s path to self-discovery advances the idea that the story of identity is complicated by one’s relocation, since mobility across physical boundaries also involves unexpected crossings of cultural borders:

In so many ways, his family’s life feels like a string of accidents, ... It had started with his father’s train wreck, paralyzing him at first, later inspiring him to make a new life on the other side of the world. There was the disappearance of the name Gogol’s great-grandmother had chosen for him, lost in the mail somewhere between Calcutta and Cambridge. This had led, in turn, to the accident of his being named Gogol, defining and distressing him for so many years. He had tried to correct that randomness, that error. And yet it had not been possible to reinvent himself fully, to break from that mismatched name. His marriage had been something of a misstep, as well... (Lahiri287)

The contingent nature of Gangulis’ evolution is related to their family history, rendered discontinuous by migration. I interpret the idea of accidents in relation with identity formation as an indicator of the fact that there are no precise rules that govern the process of cultural interaction. Gogol realises that he has tried to organise his cultural multiplicity by applying symmetric principles: the alternative adoption of cultural difference and sameness. Upon realising that his strategy has not created a balanced cultural self, Gogol understands that he has to harmonise his plurality by a different approach for which he has formulated no definition. While Friedman considers that Gogol’s remarks make up a sum of “banal, touristic observations” (123), I think they reveal his deeper understanding of the events that have influenced his destiny. Therefore, my argument aligns with Caesar’s conclusion regarding Gogol’s achieved maturity: “He seems changed, more complex, more aware of the
contradictions of his life and more accepting of them” (118). Another dimension of Gogol’s understanding is the necessity to construct a permanent dialogue between himself and the circumstances of his past. I consider one step of Gogol’s transcultural vision to be a willingness to accept his native background as a possible source for self-redefinition. As he becomes more mature, Gogol acknowledges the importance of Bengali cultural forces in the dynamics of his cultural identity:

And yet these events have formed Gogol, shaped him, determined who he is. They were things for which it was impossible to prepare but which one spent a lifetime looking back at, trying to accept, interpret, comprehend. Things that should never have happened, that seemed out of place and wrong, these were what prevailed, what endured in the end. (Lahiri 287, my emphasis)

The processes of acceptance, interpretation and comprehension indicate the permanent negotiation of Gogol’s multiple dimensions of his cultural self. In order to balance the various traditions that have shaped him, Gogol has to select the elements of a future synthesis.

Going beyond Bengali Roots and American Norms

In this context, I interpret his childhood exploration of Cape Cod under his father’s guidance as a parallel between the first and second generation approach to relocation and cultural transformation. This episode refers to a Sunday afternoon when his family drove to the ocean. While Ashima and Gogol’s sister (Sonia) waited on the shore, Ashoke and his son took a long walk along the breakwater, inspecting the entire area until they reached its margins. The father’s impulse to explore the dam may echo his youthful determination to traverse different cultures. While the father leads the way, young Gogol literally steps into his footprints, suggesting his duty to continue the first generation’s plunge into unknown territories. As they reach the margins of the dam, Ashoke asks Gogol to remember this location as “a place where there was nowhere left to go” (Lahiri 187). I suggest that Ashoke’s perception of an ultimate boundary refers to his own sense of accomplishment as an immigrant, since his escape to America as a youth marks the last stage of his transition across cultures.
Ashoke’s achievement in the USA has been recorded by Song who considers him “at peace with the decisions he has made and the life he has chosen” (362). Since Ashoke has reached the end of his journeys through arrival in America, the ultimate frontier he signals to Gogol refers to the son’s future challenge to continue what the father started through migration. Caesar interprets this scene as an expression of Ashoke’s desire to teach Gogol the “courage to explore for oneself” (114) and to “deliver the message that the act of seeking is part of who one is” (114). Taking this argument further, I consider that Gogol’s redefinition involves his seeking between cultural options, fusing different cultural elements and transgressing the very idea of separate cultures. In order to continue Ashoke’s journey, Gogol has to move beyond the condition of a successful Bengali immigrant, and therefore achieve a sense of identity that transcends his Bengali and American coordinates. Gogol’s career as an architect may be interpreted as an illustration of his urge to shape a transcultural identity, since both projects involve the creation of a complete structure based on the interconnection of different elements: “he knows that each component of a building, however small, is nevertheless essential” (Lahiri 125). In this respect, the family’s involvement in patterns of transnational relocation to India appears to be an important coordinate that contributes to Gogol’s transcultural redefinition. As well as Aura’s trips to Romania, Gogol’s travels to India help him achieve a sense of connection with his ancestors’ traditions. Although India is foreign to Gogol in a way that Romania is not to Aura, his contact with Indian cultural emblems bonds the character with his Indian cultural core in unexpected ways. For example, during one of his trips to India, Gogol is fascinated by the architecture of the Taj Mahal realizing that “no other building has affected him so powerfully” (Lahiri 85). The family’s visit to this architectural emblem marks Gogol’s opening to his Indian background, since he takes up the study of Mughal architecture while back to the USA. Moreover, his senior thesis project illustrates the character’s attempt to reconcile different cultural traditions, since it involves a comparison between Renaissance and Mughal architecture (Lahiri 120).

The transcultural awareness Gogol achieves after Ashoke’s death
helps him realise that he cannot keep emulating American models while discarding his parents’ values. As a young man, Gogol’s father was fascinated by the world of Russian literature, especially Nikolai Gogol, which suggests Ashoke’s willingness to explore different cultures, subsequently taken over by his son. Similarly, Aura’s family background displays patterns of cultural transgression that will be reflected in Aura’s capacity to develop a transcultural self. According to Caesar, Ashoke’s understanding of Nikolai Gogol’s “The Overcoat” is useful in highlighting the transcultural dimension of Gogol’s redefinition. The work of Nikolai Gogol connects Ashoke with his grandfather, who told him to read the Russian realists. This implies that Ashoke has reached a transcultural understanding before his son, given his transgression of several cultural traditions (Caesar 106). On Gogol’s fourteenth birthday, Ashoke offers him Nikolai Gogol’s book, but his son does not read it until after Ashoke’s death. While a gesture of reconnection with his father’s outlook is shown with Gogol’s decision to read “The Overcoat,” this also stands for a transgression of the two directions that have influenced his evolution (Bengali and American). This transcendence of two cultural traditions does not imply Gogol’s immersion into the Russian culture as such, but the adoption of a perspective that privileges neither of the cultural traditions that shape his identity. In this context, Gogol’s decision to travel alone (to Venice) after his divorce aligns with his effort to redefine himself by incorporating his past and also enriching it: “In the spring he went to Venice for a week ... saturating himself in its ancient, melancholy beauty” (Lahiri 283). Travelling to Europe is meant to correct the closed tradition of his family, who have never travelled to other countries apart from America and India. At the same time, Gogol’s eagerness to explore different cultures foregrounds the importance of transnational mobility in the process of transcultural redefinition.

**Aura Imbăruş: Americanisation with a Twist**

Aura Imbăruş’ experience of transnational migration illustrates her transcultural transformation by means of cultural fusion. By comparison with Gogol, the Romanian transmigrant is more mobile, a fact that can be
correlated with the faster rhythm of her cultural change. In her pre-emigration life, Aura manifests the transcultural impulse to plunge into different cultural worlds. Initially, her transcendent urge emerges as nostalgia for unspecific, exotic landscapes and eventually as a firm intention to relocate to the United States. Later on, her academic background in English philology enlarges Aura’s perspective, acquainting her with coordinates of the American culture. Aura’s childhood involves a close contact with her paternal grandparents, whose marriage offers a precious example of communication across cultural differences. Her grandmother, Irma Balint, also known as Buni (the Romanian equivalent for Granny), is of Hungarian origin and her grandfather, Ioan Imbăruş, is of Romanian descent. Despite his family’s prejudices towards Hungarians, the Romanian man eventually marries Irma and they have a happy life together. The spouses’ ability to live in harmony notwithstanding their ethnic differences illustrates the transcultural possibility to reach agreement across cultural borders:

I remembered Buni and Grandpa together, always calling each other ‘dear.’ She spoke fluent Hungarian, German, Russian and Romanian. Grandpa spoke primarily Romanian, but he learned basic Hungarian for Buni. She spoke to my grandpa in Hungarian and German, and Grandpa responded in Hungarian or Romanian. (Imbăruş 45)

Buni’s multicultural background and her ability to cohabit with cultural others paint her as a carrier of transcultural ideals. Her grandparents’ cultural profile foregrounds Aura’s diverse cultural inheritance that eases her transition to America. As well as Gogol’s, Aura’s capacity for transformation along transcultural lines appears as a continuation of her pre-emigration outlook, developed within her family. However, she is also different from Gogol, whose parents are predominantly conservative, striving to preserve their Bengali traditions after emigration. Despite Ashoke’s transcendent urge to explore the universe of Russian literature, neither he nor Ashima insists that their children transgress their Bengali roots. Part of the explanation resides in the fact that Lahiri usually defines children’s education as a prerogative of the wives, who are more attached to Bengali traditions than their husbands. Given the fact that Gogol’s and
Aura’s examples illustrate the evolution of immigrants coming from different cultures and belonging to different generations, their paths to transcultural redefinition do not follow the same trajectory. An important dissimilarity is that Aura’s pre-emigration outlook is more imbued with the values of cultural plurality than Gogol’s background. Aura’s relocation to America appears as a continuation of her pre-emigration transcultural mindset that enables her to blend different cultural models.

**Leaving Roots Behind**

A significant part of Aura’s immigration experience involves her euphoric adherence to American ideals of individual success as material accumulation. As a newly arrived immigrant, Aura perceives America by opposition with her Romanian background, which indicates the mental border she maintains between the two cultures:

People strode around confidently, no furtive slinking or trudging along with stooped shoulders. What an astonishing difference from what we had been used to all our lives: where our fellow Romanians, inured to the harsh conditions of life under Communism, wore ever-present and deeply carved worry lines on their faces, fearing that someone, anyone, might report you for whatever the reason, and punishment was sure to follow. Here everyone seemed light-hearted, a good-natured demeanor flickered in their eyes. (Imbăruş 196, my emphasis)

Aura’s dual perception of cultures configures Romania and America as sets of opposite values. America embodies freedom, relaxation and confidence, while Romania is associated with a space of communist oppression defined by fear, depression and paranoia. Aura’s life in communist Romania made her familiar with the surveillance procedures of Ceaușescu’s dictatorship that established a regime of terror in the country. This monitoring body, known as the Department of State Security (DSS) or Securitate, was established in 1948, following the model of the NKDV, the Soviet surveillance mechanism. The main task of Romania’s Securitate was to identify, punish and/or remove all opponents of the communist regime that were considered enemies of the state (Duque, *The View East*, n.p.). Given the combination of coercion,
surveillance and terror maintained with the help of the Secret Police, Romania’s case was considered unique in Eastern Europe, as the regime met with little public or political opposition. Any attempt of revolt was severely punished either by long term imprisonment, assault or imposed exile (Duque, *The View East*, n.p.). Obviously marked by this oppressive context, Aura regards her relocation to America as a possibility to transgress restrictions of this kind. More specifically, America is perceived as a world that seems to fill in the gaps of Aura’s Romanian past by offering priceless freedom. Given this state of things, Aura comes to define her sites of departure and arrival as signifiers of antipodal values. As an early immigrant, Aura displays a separatist conception of cultures that considers difference and not sameness, as an important criterion of definition. In this respect, she is similar to Gogol, given that he initially perceives the Bengali and American traditions as incompatible facets of his identity.

Another similarity between Aura and Gogol is their involvement in patterns of transnational mobility that renders them transmigrants, who maintain connections with their native cultural cores. However, Aura’s transnational regime is different from Gogol’s, as the frequency of her trips to Romania is higher than Gogol’s family visits to India. In her case, the repeated journeys to Romania function as cultural barometers that indicate the degree of Aura’s adjustment to the American culture. More specifically, Aura’s reconnection with Sibiu at different time intervals helps her assess the (faulty and beneficial) directions of Romania’s socio-political transformations. By expressing her own position towards Romania’s evolution, Aura is able to clarify the development of her own post-migration loyalties. In some cases, her return journeys reveal the surge of Americanisation in Aura’s cultural profile. In other instances, her temporary homecoming makes Aura’s aware of her denial of roots that triggers her desire to reconstruct the bond with her ancestors’ culture. The diverse effects of Aura’s different return journeys are discussed in more details throughout this section. The following paragraph examines the manner in which Aura’s reinsertion into her native space reflects the strengthening of her American allegiance. Aura’s first visit back to Romania is motivated by her educational plans which involve her starting
a PhD at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. Although brief, this trip makes Aura evaluate the configuration of her cultural loyalties. This temporary return journey helps Aura realise that she has transferred her home allegiance to LA, in the short interval following her departure from Romania: “Despite the Revolution, Romanian society was still rigid and monotone compared to America. I could never live in Romania again, not for any length of time. At least, this was my feeling at the time ... I loved LA. I had no doubts this was my home” (Imbărășu 209). Aura’s thoughts illustrate her fast adjustment to America which is a result of her perceived compatibility with the American values. I consider that her feeling of belonging to the American space is also a consequence of her transcendent cultural outlook, shaped before her emigration. Aura’s exposure to the American canvas helps her fashion her version of success in terms of the capacity to purchase and enjoy exclusivist brands. Her access to the American world of plenty seems to cancel the restrictions of her previous life in communist scarcity:

We traveled and bought designer clothes, another BMW-a Z 4-and a Hummer, and later an RV. My American Dream was materializing. I bought a US flag and proudly put it up. No more dark nights in bleak and unheated spaces, no more lukewarm water and rationed food. No more nightmares about a government listening to my conversations and opening up my mail. I was now truly an American citizen. (Imbărășu 229-30)

Aura’s steadfast pursuit of her consumerist ideals appears as a consequence of her communist background of destitution and restrictions. During the last decade of Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, the Romanian population was confronted with extreme levels of poverty. The communist dictator was keen on paying the state’s foreign debt in order to acquire an independent position that would enable him to ignore the claim on human rights made by Romania’s trading partners. As a result, common people had to face food and electricity shortages, waiting in long lines for basic items (Livezeanu 2007). Aura seems particularly affected by this type of deprivation experienced in most of her pre-emigration life. Hence, Aura equates Americanisation with a long chain of acquisitions, meant to erase the shortages of her past. Her struggle to fulfil the American ideal of prosperity and freedom acquires huge proportions, as she becomes
addicted to American standards of consumption. Aura’s relation with her Romanian cultural core is influenced by her adherence to the American ideals of self-reliance and accumulation. In her effort to align with these standards of achievement, Aura deliberately neglects her contact with the source culture, perceived as an obstacle to her Americanisation: “feeling like I wanted to leave Romania behind, I’d actually distanced myself from my countrymen as much as I could” (Îmbăruș 250). Aura’s desire to embrace forces of cultural difference resembles Gogol’s initial urge to shun elements of his Bengali identity. As a teenager, Gogol hates going to Bengali classes and resents the family’s visits to Calcutta. Similarly, he is unwilling to follow a career embraced by most of the Bengalis in America (lawyers, doctors, engineers). The character’s predicament is illustrated by the concept of American born confused/conflicted deshi (ABCD) commented at a panel discussion about Indian novels in English. The connotation of marginality invoked in the discussion reminds Gogol of a “medical condition,” therefore a negative experience (Lahiri 118). This association reveals Gogol’s rejection of his ethnic origins that mark him as different from mainstream Americans. However, Aura’s relation with her Romanian background does not acquire the resentment accumulated by Gogol. His different approach to identity can be explained by the fact that Gogol’s birth in America creates a much bigger gap between him and his parents’ values. By contrast, Aura arrives in America in her adulthood and out of her own will, and these elements increase her chances of adaptation. While she does not attempt to suppress her Romanian self as Gogol does with his Bengali inheritance, Aura overlooks the importance of her native background for maintaining a whole sense of herself. At the same time, her accelerated mobility between Romania and America prevents her from forgetting the coordinates of her Romanian profile.

**Roots and Routes: Overlapping Dimensions**

On another trip to Romania, Aura spends an entire summer in Sibiu where she gets her PhD degree. This is a moment of personal triumph, an illustration of her ambition and ability to handle a transnational life. However, her repeated travel between America and Romania, without her
husband, gradually marks a deterioration of their relationship. Her focus on career development leaves Aura no time for sharing her achievements with Michael. Eventually, Aura becomes aware of the emotional costs of her obstinate adherence to American norms of accomplishment. Her reconnection with Sibiu offers the necessary interval to process the consequences of her Americanisation in consumerist terms:

I became an AI—and it didn't stand for Aura Imbăruș. It stood for Artificial Intelligence, Artifice Image, the Appearance of Invincibility, Alienated Identity. All of the above. My addiction to things, which had been growing unnoticed for years, became overwhelming... I needed piles of new things to feel welcome in my hated home and worthy of being acknowledged by others

I was the navel of the universe, a confirmed solipsist. (Imbăruș 251)

Aura’s sense of identity seems conditioned by her capacity to accumulate more and more goods. Her purchasing addiction may be interpreted as a strategy of sheltering herself by means of material possessions, meant to consolidate Aura’s newly born American individuality. Absorbed by her ambition, Aura does not assess her profound transformation that triggers her separation from Michael. After they agree to divorce, Aura realizes that she needs to examine the effects of her obsessive search for material success. Entangled in her growing individualism, Aura needs to reconnect with other sources of meaning that might save her from the vortex of excessive consumption: “Clearly I needed to get back to things that brought me joy, peace, and purpose” (Imbăruș 252). Determined to change the hectic rhythm of her life, Aura needs to reconnect with her Romanian side and starts joining the monthly meetings of the Romanian American Professional Network (RAPN). Thus, when Aura feels lost amidst her consumerist fantasies, she finds “comforting solace” (Imbăruș 250) in the familiar presence of the Romanian community in California. Interestingly, both Aura and Gogol need to reconnect with their non-American side in moments of personal distress, namely the loss of a dear one, either by divorce (Aura) or death (Gogol). After Ashoke’s disappearance, Gogol realises that certain Bengali traditions, i.e. the mourning rituals performed for his father, are the only elements of support
in times of suffering. His former indifference to these customs is superseded by a sense of belonging, induced by his ability to share them with his mother and sister.

Similarly, Aura’s need to reconnect with her homeland by means of physical travel has to be understood in the context of this personal crisis that triggers a revaluation of her connection with her roots. One of her visits back home may be interpreted as a symbol of personal revival that coincides with a perceived “rebirth” (Imbăruș 253) of Romanian society. Aura is surprised by the transformation of her native city, temporarily selected as the cultural capital of Europe. She is impressed by its restoration, appreciating its successful blend of old traditions and new influences. The positive changes of Sibiu infuse Aura with optimism, making her feel proud of her Romanian inheritance: “Romanians had persevered after all. They had rebuilt their museums, reerected their monuments, sponsored and hosted artistic and cultural events and aimed at restoring the history and culture of a proud people” (Imbăruș 253). I interpret the perceived metamorphosis of the Romanian space as an echo of Aura’s own attempts to redefine herself along less individualist lines. The fact that her visit back home is no longer motivated by professional objectives signals a shift from a success-oriented life to a more tranquil rhythm. Perhaps the most important element of this temporary return is the time Aura spends by herself, reflecting upon her relation with her Romanian side: “I didn't even realize how much I had missed being with my family, here in the old routine...” (Imbăruș 254). Analyzed through the perspective of transnational migration, this visit to Romania signals the gradual reconfiguration of Aura’s loyalties. The days spent in her native city remind Aura of the importance of her roots and the family values that she has neglected in her race of success. As well as Gogol, Aura realizes that her desire for Americanisation has triggered the suppression of her source culture: “Walled off by responsibilities and wealth and material things, I had lost track of myself and my connections to my husband, my family, my community, my history” (Imbăruș 282). Aura’s ambition, energy and determination have turned her into a victim of her own dreams. Focused on accelerated accumulation and consumption she has failed to maintain all her cultural facets interconnected. Confronted with
feelings of fragmentation and loss, Aura realises that her happiness is conditioned by her ability to blend her Romanian and American experiences. Equipped with this new understanding, Aura reconnects with her former husband, reconfiguring a balanced sense of identity: “I’ve finally found true meaning again ... I had been so set on blocking out our past and conquering the American Dream – and I didn’t even know what it really was. I feel like Transylvania feeds my roots, but I define myself as an American of Romanian descent – that’s who I am” (Imbăruș 287).

Aura’s new perspective makes room for her involvement in the activities of the Romanian community, where she finds a real self of purpose. Her need to consider her Romanian roots as an important part of her immigrant condition illustrates the enduring relevance of cultural loyalties and national belonging. These coordinates function as valid identity references paralleled by the fluidity of borders that seem to undermine the individuals’ need to feel anchored. Aura’s impulse to reconnect with the Romanian community in California illustrates the need to alleviate the alienating effects of extreme individualism, motivated by professional development and financial success: “No possession can ever have the lasting power to satiate the deeper hunger and longing within me: no, that requires the people in our life who love us and root for us and make us better human beings than we would have been without them” (Imbăruș 289, my emphasis). Human bonds and emotional support seem more important to Aura than the individualist race for material accumulation. Aura’s longing for rootedness illustrates the importance of stable references in the shaping of transmigrant identity. Although her regime of transnational mobility seems to diminish the relevance of settlement and community bonds, Aura needs to manage her multifaceted self by reconnecting with her Romanian legacy. Aura’s involvement in a non-profit organization for Romanian immigrant support illustrates her decision to redefine herself along transcultural lines. More specifically, Aura’s recipe for immigrant success presupposes an integration of American norms into the Romanian background: “I decided RAPN could help Romanian immigrants like us adjust to life in the United States without them feeling that they have to give up their identity. . . We think showing pride in our culture helps newer immigrants feel secure – and
proud” (Imbăruș 287, my emphasis). Aura’s commitment to the preserving of Romanian values illustrates her new conception of immigrant survival, born out of her initial failed approach to cultural transformation. Her intention to support other Romanian immigrants expresses Aura’s desire to share the lesson she has learned with other fellow Romanians. Accordingly, the successful integration of Romanian immigrants entails their ability to engage in creative pluralism, by accommodating their values with American values and norms. Moreover, immigrant dignity is conditioned by their respect for their cultural inheritance that has to remain a significant part of their American lives.

Conclusions

This paper represents an attempt to sketch a comparative framework for analysing narratives of transcultural change in the context of transnational migration. The discussion has focused on different literary genres (a novel and a memoir), written by authors from different cultural spaces (Romania and India). Although these differences might discourage a comparative perspective, the present analysis has demonstrated that processes of transcultural redefinition operated by Indian and Romanian transmigrants do exhibit similar patterns. A significant similarity is represented by Gogol’s and Aura’s transcendent urge that motivates their desire to take over different cultural values and enrich their native cultural cores, perceived as incomplete systems. Interestingly, this transgressive outlook appears to have been shaped in the countries of origin, before the migration started. In Gogol’s case, this transcendent disposition is configured as a male family trait, passed on from his grandfather to his father and finally to him. In an almost similar fashion, Aura has witnessed the effects of cultural transgression in her own multicultural family. This early acquaintance with cultural difference helps her negotiate cultural plurality and eventually build a transcultural self by means of creative pluralism. Interestingly, both Aura and Gogol experience their path to transcultural transformation as a struggle between rejecting and accepting the forces of cultural sameness. More specifically, both of them seem more preoccupied with taking over different cultural values, rather than
maintaining their native cultural norms. At this point, I would argue that Gogol’s struggle to repress his parents’ (Bengali) background acquires larger proportions than Aura’s. As a member of the second generation, Gogol experiences a larger distance from the Bengali traditions and a stronger impulse to contest them. By contrast, Aura is a first generation transmigrant, therefore her relation with her Romanian background is not as strongly mediated by temporal distance. Moreover, her regime of transnational relocation is more intense than Gogol’s, which suggests that she can maintain stronger connections with her source culture. Despite these important differences, Gogol and Aura share a strong desire to adopt American values and somehow “correct” their cultural inheritance. They both focus on taking over elements of difference, overlooking the relevance of their native cultural cores. However, at some point both of them become aware of the necessity to acknowledge their ancestors’ values and reconcile their native backgrounds with foreign cultural elements. Another similarity between Aura and Gogol is that they acknowledge the importance of their Romanian / Bengali roots in moments of family crises. As they are confronted with the possibility of losing a dear one, Aura and Gogol need to retrieve their cultural roots and blend their centripetal dimensions with American cultural values.

The analysis has suggested that similar mechanisms of transcultural redefinition may be upheld by transmigrants irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Aura’s and Gogol’s evolution supports the idea that displaced individuals struggle to comprehend their cultural plurality, hesitating between rejecting and accepting their own specificity and the difference of others. However, once they are able to acknowledge the relevance of their roots, the transmigrants under discussion are able to adopt creative pluralism as a strategy of identity negotiation.

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‘Global’ Identity or the (Ir)Reducible Other:
The Cultural Logic of Global Identity in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Man with the Twisted Lip*

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Abstract
After the Syrian civil war, deaths of those fleeing crisis areas have tragically become a regular news item. Not new to the world, however, such crises emerge from tensions between identity and difference as codified in international politics, whereby refugees and migrants become the Other and subject to unyielding universals, such as the law or narrow concepts of what is right. Indeed, the cultural logic of “global identities” informing the current refugee and migrant crisis seems recurrent, as exemplified in the recent cases of the Tamils from Sri Lanka and the Somalis. The cultural logic of global identity is also reflected in the popular nineteenth-century novella by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, in which the main character disguises himself as a professional beggar to appeal to middle class values in order to incite their guilty consciences. Drawing on Ian Baucom, Marc Shell, and Jean-Joseph Goux, this article argues that the main character’s actions reflect and embody the cultural logic of the global politico-economy in late nineteenth century London. As such, Doyle’s novella illustrates the Derridean notion of hospitality by revealing that “identity and difference are mutually constitutive” (Baker 109) and offers insightful commentary on the current refugee and migrant crisis.

Keywords: Global identity, global trade, refugee crisis, hospitality, globalization, space-of-flow, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Thomas De Quincey, opium trade
After the Syrian civil war, in 2015 alone, “two thousand five hundred people are estimated to have died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean” (Nordberg), and in May 2016, a headline telegraphically informed us: “three days, 700 deaths on Mediterranean” (Yardley and Pianigiani). At the center of the refugee or migrant crisis is a reduction of individuals to the Other, which reflects a history of tension between identity and difference in international politics as conducted on the basis of established law. Currently, for example, refugees and migrants are required to conform to European Union laws, in order to obtain universally accepted human rights. Ironically, however, national immigration policies within the EU only allow those within their borders who can afford to hire smugglers – itself a dangerous and risky practice – whereas the less privileged, without resources or connections, must stay in their countries. As Jenny Nordberg reports, “the E.U. has tried to avoid granting prospective refugees [a basic human right] by making it nearly impossible for them to enter any of its countries legally.” She further points out that since it is practically impossible for an Afghan to get a visa, s/he must “hir[e] smugglers” and spend “between ten thousand and eighteen thousand dollars per person,” due to which it seems as if the EU were sending the message, “‘We won’t do anything to help you while you’re on land, but once you risk your life, we will try to get there before you drown’” (Nordberg).

EU policy in this vein offers a Procrustean-bed solution that makes its guests fit their host’s terms. Thus, Gideon Baker rightly observes that “hospitality … has always been limited, offered subject to strict and domesticating conditionalities by a sovereign host” (109). That is, although rights and laws seem to be presented as universal, the “dialectical attempt to finally resolve the tension between identity and difference in world politics” is not universal, but “deeply particular” (Baker 115), as “the particular [is subsumed] within the universal” (Baker 108). In other words, the Procrustean irony of ‘global identity’ – as revealed in the national immigration policies of the EU – is that the ‘global identity’ of refugees and migrants flattens individuals into an Other, narrowly defined, thereby denying basic human rights to
individuals who do not fit into the EU-defined Other. As such, global identity reveals cultural logic.

While it seems highly advisable to amend existing national immigration policies within the EU, it can prove just as worthwhile to examine the cultural logic of global identity informing this refugee and migrant crisis. Indeed, the cultural logic of global identity seems recurrent. Thus, in the late twentieth century, Tamils from Sri Lanka and Somalis became asylum seekers in the global North or neighboring countries by means of migrant smugglers and brokers (van Hear 179-80). Since the smugglers and brokers demanded remuneration, only those who could afford it were likely to get to affluent countries in Europe or North America, where they would be “better off than refugees in Pakistan and Iran” (van Hear 179).

The same cultural logic informing global identity emerges in a popular nineteenth-century British novella, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. When Sherlock Holmes uncovers the deception perpetrated by a country gentleman, Mr. Neville St. Clair, he reveals that St. Clair came to his wealth by disguising himself as a professional beggar, who was the beneficiary of donations from passersby. More importantly here, St. Clair profited by playing on middle class expectations and awakening their guilty consciences. In striking similarity to today’s socio-economic values, *Twisted Lip* echoes Ian Baucom’s observation regarding Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason and Dixon*, that “the period of history in which we live should be understood either as an inordinately long twentieth century or as a very, very long eighteenth” (159). In this vein, I will abstract the cultural logic of global identity in Doyle’s narrative in order to rethink the current refugee and migrant crisis. I argue that St. Clair is, in Pynchon’s terms, a figure of “the doings of global trade in miniature” (qtd. in Baucom 158), reflecting and embodying the cultural logic of the global politico-economy in the late nineteenth-century London, the patterns of which we recognize today as well. Drawing on Marc Shell and Jean-Joseph Goux, I further argue that St. Clair and the British Empire are doubles. Lastly, by foreshadowing the current refugee and migrant crisis, *Twisted Lip* suggests the Derridean
notion of hospitality as revealed in Britain’s dependence on the Other in the opium trade.

**St. Clair as a Figure of “the Doings of Global Trade in Miniature”**

Doyle’s *Twisted Lip* begins with the story of Isa Whitney, whose addiction to opium has advanced ever since college, when he read Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Worried because he has been missing for two days, Mrs. Whitney asks Watson to find her husband, who is believed to be in an opium den in Upper Swandam Lane, where Watson does indeed find him. There, by chance Watson meets Sherlock Holmes, and both start work on finding another missing gentleman, St. Clair. While Susan Cannon Harris claims that “the crime in question has only the slightest of tangential relations with opium-smoking” (460), the opium den is suggestive of a center of serious crimes. The beggar whom St. Clair impersonates, Hugh Boone, is suspected of the murder of St. Clair. Once St. Clair’s fabrication is uncovered, Holmes agrees that he will not divulge St. Clair’s deception, as long as he ends his double life, and thus, his family will continue to know him as a country gentleman. Considering that the opium den is the solution to both Watson’s and Holmes’ cases, the novella does after all suggest that St. Clair’s ‘crime’ has a close relationship with opium-smoking, or, more specifically, with the global trade supporting opium-smoking and the opium den. In this manner, St. Clair’s begging reflects what Baucom calls laws of global economy. As I will discuss in the next section, the proximity of St. Clair’s business to Exchange Alley, the East India Company, and the opium den is significant, as this location enables St. Clair to tap into the surplus cash in *spaces-of-flows*, which identify buildings or areas critical to financial transactions.

In “Globalit, Inc.; or, The Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies,” Baucom traces patterns in what he perceives as “the form of the global” (159). Beginning with a question Thomas Pynchon’s Mason and Dixon ask, “‘why has ev’ry Observation site proposed by the Royal Society prov’d to be a Factory, or Consulate, or other Agency of some
royally Charter’d Company?’” (qtd. in Baucom 158), Baucom suggests two analogies between the late eighteenth century and the late twentieth century, and global capital and global literary studies. According to him, many scholars have recently discussed the first analogy between the late eighteenth and the late twentieth century. For instance, in Baucom’s reading, Giovani Arrighi recognizes that the same “fundamental logic and effect of … structures” in chartered companies and transnational corporations can be found in the way “New York replaces London, which replaces Amsterdam as the center of global finance capital” (160). Based on Arrighi’s observation of the repetition of this global form in the last three hundred years, Baucom makes a bold claim that “the analogy … between then and now is not an analogy at all but an eternal recurrence” (160). For the second analogy between global capital and global literary studies, Baucom poses that Frederic Jameson’s The Political Unconscious can be viewed as a rewriting of Walter Scott, one that shows “extraordinary influence on the development of a quasi-global method of literary study” as well as “a neo-Romantic response to the problems of global capital and global form” (161). For the purposes of this article, I will focus on “the global process to which Scott was responding” (Baucom 162), as it can help explain ways in which literature intersects with global capital in St. Clair’s London.

Baucom sums up the global processes in Scotland based on his reading of Ronald Meek and Walter Scott as follows. First, “the reorganization of global capital” transformed Glasgow “as one of the globe’s spaces of flows” (Baucom 161-2). Through this process, “the Lowlands city linked itself to, and concentrated in itself the wealth of, an expanding series of capital horizons: primary among them the Highlands (through the confiscation and enclosure of sheep-farming lands), North America (by the tobacco plantations), and Africa (by the slave trade)” (Baucom 162). Second, the underdeveloped areas in the developed regions, what Baucom would call “temporal irregularities” (161), could be understood as a “spectral counternarrative of the global” or “cultural haunting” in which the Highlands, Africa, and North America return to the Lowlands metropolitan entrepôts (162).
The global processes Baucom discusses in connection with Scotland seem to take place in St. Clair’s London as well. In *Twisted Lip*, for example, London has “temporal irregularities” (Baucom 161) similar to Meek’s discussion of the map of Scotland. That is, London was divided into spatially and temporally different areas according to their economic development. This becomes obvious in Doyle’s narrative, when Mrs. St. Clair declared she “did not like the neighbourhood” around the opium den, which contrasts with the area around the “offices of the Aberdeen Shipping Company” (10). As such, Baucom’s three laws – expansion contracts, contraction enriches, and enrichment haunts – play out in *Twisted Lip* as well. The opium den is supposedly located in the East End, which “from the earliest times … has been associated with the great blight of London poverty” (Ackroyd xii). From its poverty, the East End points to the business part of the city, which “linked itself to, and concentrated in itself the wealth of, an expanding series of capital horizons,” making the East End analogous to the British colonies. The East End and the opium den further illustrate Baucom’s law of global economy, “enrichment haunts” (162). That is, the business district of the city expands its capital horizons and concentrates the wealth, while the East End, “‘a microcosm of London’s past’” (Ackroyd xii), and the opium den in St. Clair’s London, illustrate “the haunting return of difference” (Baucom 162), as, for instance, when Britain’s colonies are implied as a Malay attends customers, and a Lascar manages the business. In this manner, Baucom’s three laws of global economy is applicable to *Twisted Lip*.

The Opium Den and St. Clair Tapping into the Spaces-of-Flows

The possible locations of St. Clair’s “begging business” and the opium den seem to be near Exchange Alley, and thereby constitute what Giovanni Arrighi and John Ruggie call “spaces-of-flows,” which are spaces that are linked to the furthest corners of the earth but that belong less to the city or state in which they happen to have come to rest than to the principles of exchange they embody, the “flows of precious metals, bills of exchange […] monetary surpluses” they regulate, the conversion of endless variety into a single, general equivalent: money (82-83). The
Bourse in Amsterdam, Exchange Alley in London, Wall Street in New York are, for Arrighi, the form the global has repeatedly taken over the past three hundred years, the form, one might suggest, of an end of history that happens not once but serially… (Baucom 160)

In *Twisted Lip*, St. Clair describes his movement in the city as follows. He “took [his] station in the business part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a beggar” (Doyle 10). Further, he lodged in the opium den in Upper Swandam Lane, and “could every morning emerge as a squalid beggar and in the evenings transform [him]self into a well-dressed man about town” (Doyle 10). Moreover, according to Watson, “Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge” (Doyle 1), and the opium den is, as Holmes explains, “near the corner of Paul’s Wharf” (Doyle 3). Further, Mrs. St. Clair reports, the opium den was on her way from the office of the Aberdeen Shipping Company to the station (Doyle 4). With these clues and the help of a map of “London in the 19th and 20th Centuries” found on the website of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, it is possible to approximate where the opium den and St. Clair’s station could have been in the nineteenth-century London.

Figure 1. The Map, “London in the 19th and 20th Centuries”
Doyle, of course, could have made up everything regarding the location of the opium den and St. Clair’s begging station: the distance between Paul’s Wharf and London Bridge seems quite farther than implied in the novella. Moreover, the opium den “in the farthest east of the City” (Doyle 1) may not be located in East End. Yet, those who lived in London of the nineteenth century might have imagined where this opium den and St. Clair’s begging station could have been. Since Upper Swandam Lane could have been Swan Lane, which is right next to London Bridge, the route Mrs. St. Clair could have taken to get to the shipping company from the station could be from Liverpool Street Railway Station through Exchange Alley and past The East India Company to the opium den, near London Bridge. What is significant is that the shipping company as well as “the business part of the city” (Doyle 10), where St. Clair begged, could be near Exchange Alley and The East India Company.

Thus, Exchange Alley as a space-of-flow is “linked to the furthest corners of the earth but … belong[s] less to the city or state in which [it] happen[s] to have come to rest.” The description could apply to the opium den in that it has a perhaps imaginary geographical location near Exchange Alley, but also because opium can create an imaginary space which does not belong to London or any part of the physical world. Doyle’s opium den is “an alien environment … [and his] description of the opium den reflects the fear that, instead of creating Gladstone’s ‘happy Englands’ (Gladstone 202) abroad, the Empire was allowing China to recreate its opium-induced miseries at home” (Harris 455). This seems very much like Baucom’s law that enrichment haunts.

Doyle is not alone in describing the opium den in this manner. De Quincey in Suspiria de Profundis describes this imaginary, narcotic, “terribly alien” space “of suspended autonomy,” (Krishnan 204), as “some separate chamber in [one’s] brain” (qtd. in Krishnan 204). Indeed, De Quincey hallucinates so much so that London seems to be “some of these terrae incognitae” (De Quincey 25, italics in the original), which “is likened to an arctic region through which ‘ambitious’ explorers navigate with hopes of discovering a quicker route from Europe to Asia” (Krishnan 207). Thus, opium “transport[s]” the opium eater to “Asiatic scenes,” even
while he is at home (De Quincey 38). As “the vector of the narcotic pushes the self [De Quincey] toward the terrors and possibilities opened up by difference” (Krishnan 205), it is probably this aspect (which Zieger calls “De Quinceyan exotic mental voyaging” [1532]) that the first missing husband, Whitney, wished to achieve in the opium den: “for having read De Quincey’s description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects” (Doyle 1). Further underscoring the exotic space that “belong[s] less to the city” of London than “the furthest corners of the earth,” it is “a sallow Malay” (Doyle 2) who attends customers and “the rascally Lascar” (3) who runs the business in the opium den.

Baucom, and Global Literature, and Global Capital in De Quincey and St. Clair

By means of Whitney’s explicit reference to De Quincey, then, the opium den and all its associations in Twisted Lip are significantly related to “De Quinceyan exotic voyaging” in an imaginary, liminal space. Since the city of De Quincey’s hallucinated vision in Confessions intersects with that of global commerce, the opium den is also related to the global economy. De Quincey uses geographical terms for exploration and international trade such as “north-west passage” and “terrae incognitae” while describing his experience of walking in London under the influence of opium:

…sometimes in my attempts to steer homewards, upon nautical principles, by fixing my eye on the pole-star, and seeking ambitiously for a north-west passage, instead of circumnavigating all the capes and head-lands I had doubled in my outward voyage, I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, such enigmatical entries, and such sphynx’s riddles of streets without thoroughfares. … I could almost have believed at times that I must be the first discoverer of some of these terrae incognitae, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London. (De Quincey 25, my italics)

In regards to these words, Sanjay Krishnan argues that “the relocation of London to the frozen waters to the north of Canada and Alaska is authorized by the reference to the elusive ‘Northwest Passage,’ which
stood in the collective imagination of English traders of the time as code for the vast markets for opium in Asia” (207). It is worth noting that even De Quincey’s narcotic vision comprises the collective imagination of English trades of the time, and that what he was seeking, a north-west passage, would lead him to global markets for opium. This imaginary, narcotic space is likened to a place of commerce of some sort in Suspiria de Profundis: “The dreamer finds housed within himself … holding, perhaps from that station a secret and detestable commerce with his own heart – some horrid alien nature” (qtd. in Krishnan 204, my italics).

For De Quincey, this “commerce with his own heart” turns out to benefit not only his literary profession but also his national economy by means of the power of literary imagination. While he “stressed [opium] did not create anything new but embellished what already existed, heightening awareness of latent thoughts and imagination” (Booth 36), De Quincey seems to have benefited from opium in terms of his literary profession. Not only De Quincey, but “a substantial number of creative artists … were also addicted and … through their addiction, changed the direction of Western literature” (Booth 40). Further, in a different context, De Quincey advocated not physical but imaginative invasion of China when he supported the Opium War with China, again underscoring Baucom’s law that enrichment haunts:

…what is needed, [De Quincey] says, is not a physical invasion of Chinese territory, but an imaginative invasion of the Chinese mind; not violence, but the representation of potential violence. The poetic effect adverted to here is the Sublime of terror, where the withholding of any physical threat to the observer defeats his inclination to resist the “impression” of annihilative power, thus enabling that impression to extend and secure its control over his imagination. (Rzepka 43)

While the Opium War would fix the “alarming hemorrhage of funds” caused by the trade with China by “restoring equilibrium and generating a surplus of dynamic power” (Krishnan 209), De Quincey emphasizes the power of literary imagination to bring about the desired effects on the trade with China.

Framed in the global economy, De Quincey’s narcotic literary vision recurs in Doyle’s novella when St. Clair dreams of financial
success, takes advantage of “the business part of the city,” and taps into the surplus cash in the spaces-of-flows. Whereas De Quincey uses the power of literature to support his national economy, St. Clair deploys his imaginative power to support his domestic economy. Although he says he pretended to be “a match-seller but really [was] a beggar,” St. Clair was actually a business man who used his skills in disguise and repartee (Doyle 10). While “offering the public an experience that conflates charity with entertainment” (Marck 109), St. Clair “has created a new profession … [He] offers an early version of street theatre not far removed from the performances of modern buskers” (Marck 111). In other words, St. Clair exchanges a sense of charity and entertainment for coins, as encouraged by his pitiable appearance and repartee. Unwittingly, passersby in the space of flow (i.e. the business district) engaged in this trade. For being entertained by the beggar as well as feeling good about their acts of charity, they give money to St. Clair.

Shell and Goux: Commercial Language and the Notion of Old Value in St. Clair’s Begging Business

In addition to the analogy between global capital and global literature that Baucom suggests, St. Clair’s trade between charity and entertainment, in particular, goes beyond that analogy. Indeed, with regard to St. Clair’s repartee, it is his literary skill that becomes exchangeable for money. That is, the relation between literature and economy is more than analogous. In this vein, St. Clair’s use of literary trope and verbal skill may be best understood in Shell’s terms. In The Economy of Literature, Shell makes a bolder claim that is more than an analogy, to discuss “the relation between … literary exchanges and the exchanges that constitute the political economy” (7). He argues that “[l]iterary works are composed of small tropic exchanges or metaphors, some of which can be analyzed in terms of signified economic content and all of which can be analyzed in terms of economic form” (7). Thus, in Chapter 4, “The Lie of the Fox: Rousseau’s Theory of Verbal, Monetary, and Political Representation,” Shell explains Rousseau’s reading of Aesop’s fable, “The Fox and the Crow,” along these lines: The hungry Fox approaches the Crow and flatters him about
his voice, who starts to sing. As he does so, the Crow loses the cheese he held in his beak, and the Fox says, “‘Learn that every flatterer. / Lives at the expense of him who listens. / This lesson is worth a cheese, without doubt’” (qtd. in Shell 115). While Shell makes various points, I will focus on his argument that commercial characters are “a common measure … of all commodities” (123) to discuss St. Clair’s repartee and disguise as a commercial language. In Marc Shell’s terms, St. Clair’s words, which reflect his “excellent education” (Doyle 10), act like “a common measure.”

In *The Economy of Literature*, Shell discusses the close relationship between alphabets and a monetary economy, particularly as found in commercial language. Thus, he attributes to Rousseau the idea that “the historical development of the alphabet corresponds to that of a monetary economy and to that of a police state,” which “explains the origin of commercial language and, perhaps, what we call ‘commercials,’” in part because merchants travelling to several countries would have to invent characters that could be understood by all (123). Shell further explicates how these “characters are like money, which is a common measure not of all languages (as the alphabet) but of all commodities,” since they “are common measures of sounds, or alphabetical symbols, that permit translation through signs of sounds of words” (123, my italics). He then goes on to compare monetary characters with alphabetical characters: “Monetary characters permit the translation of these commodities; similarly, alphabetical characters (and puns) permit the sonal representation of two languages in one medium” (123).

In this sense, St. Clair’s business takes advantage of what Shell, by means of one of Aesop’s fables, explains as “the terrifying common denominator that makes possible the economic exchange of flattering words (which the fox gives) for objects (which the fox receives)” in Aesop’s fable (119). Referring to Rousseau’s discussion of the fable, Shell argues that “The fox, having well digested the power of the double entendre, turns out to be an excellent poet. He makes language, alien and alienating, serve his own ends, as did the Greek sophists. Like Gyges, he is the banker-tyrant of the modern world” (123, italics in the original). In other words, the fox who flatters (and lies) about the crow’s appearance
and voice, makes the crow confuse nature (the signified) with words (the signifier). The fox’s flattery (i.e., a commercial intended to swap his words with the cheese) becomes exchangeable for the cheese, thereby working like money, “a common measure … of all commodities.” Likewise, St. Clair’s disguise and repartee produce effects similar to those of a commercial intended to encourage people to be good to a pitiable person. In other words, St. Clair creates a demand in the charity market to create what Gary Shapiro calls an “asymmetric relationship of giver and receiver” (281). Simply put, St. Clair creates the opportunity to exchange charity for coins.

What is involved in the exchange, however, is more complex. Thus, St. Clair’s performance comprises symbols understood by all those involved in a business transaction; he partakes of a commercial language, one that involves money. Importantly, his words and disguise are common measures not of all languages but of the language of the middle class. As Nancy Anne Marck points out, “His portrayal of Hugh Boone offers a middle-class interpretation of begging that romanticizes and exoticizes poverty and dependence, an interpretation that evades the reality of the beggar by treating it as a stage role” (108). Therefore, “few beggars could compete with the likes of Hugh Boone” since “St. Clair’s financial success results directly from his connection to the [middle] class he evades through disguise” (Marck 108). That is, with his bedraggled appearance and his witty repartee, St. Clair communicates not as real beggars would, but in a manner that is appealing and understandable to those with a middle-class mind set.

Shell’s discussion of Rousseau’s reading of Aesop’s fable further suggests the possibly inherent exploitation in St. Clair’s business. Shell argues:

The récit of the fox in “Le Corbeau et le renard” is a clever exchange of words for cheese that sustains the fox’s life and crafty nature. Rousseau suggests that bad tutors and even La Fontaine [the translator] himself are exploiters like the fox. The fox’s claim that his leçon is worth a cheese is, on a level deeper, perhaps, than La Fontaine’s irony, a claim that the fable itself contains a worthy leçon.

La Fontaine’s fable (like the fox’s récit) turns out to be a kind of merchandise. It is a commodity to be exchanged for something else. At
the same time it is a process of apparently counterfeit linguistic
metaphors, or purchases and sales of meanings. (126, italics in the
original)

Just as the Fox’s trickery exploits the Crow to obtain his cheese, St.
Clair’s false representation of a disabled beggar deceives passersby and
exploits them to obtain their money, while pretending that his physical
condition is worthy of their charity. By becoming “a recognizable
character in the City” (Doyle 10), he does what Arrighi observes in
chartered companies, which “monitor, regulate, and profit from the
disequilibrria of world trade” (qtd. in Baucom 159). While St. Clair
regulates the flow of surplus coins in the businessmen’s pockets by
attracting his charitable customers from other competitors (e.g., beggars),
he taps into the “profit[s] from the disequilibria of world trade,” which
circulate in the financial district of the city, the space-of-flow. In the terms
Baucom borrows from Thomas Pynchon, St. Clair is one of “the doings of
global trade in miniature” (qtd. in Baucom 158). If Exchange Alley is “the
form the global has repeatedly taken over the past three hundred years”
(Baucom 160) and the chartered company as a figure, in Baucom’s terms,
“permits us to imagine and name the forms that capital takes in a moment
of globalization” (159), then St. Clair is such a figure as well.

Shell’s reading of “The Fox and the Crow” helps us better
understand St. Clair’s use of commercial language in his begging business
and his “doings of the global trade in miniature,” but it does not quite
explain the fact that both St. Clair’s charitable passersby and Aesop’s
Crow were not aware that they were in fact trading respectively with St.
Clair and the Fox. What appears to be non-financial transactions,
however, can be explained using Jean-Joseph Goux’s terms: St. Clair’s
business presents the premonetary symbols at face value while de-
segregating “a notion of economic value” (126) from the symbol and re-
attaching the symbol to “the old notion of value” (126). Aesop’s Crow as
discussed by Shell thus proves to be an example of Goux’s “old notion of
value,” and resembles the charitable passersby who give money to St.
Clair.

In Symbolic Economies, Goux explains Louis Gernet’s
“premonetary conception of value” and Jean-Pierre Vernant’s “rational
contrivance’ of legal tender” (126). The premonetary conception of value – as in “the mythical notion of value in ancient Greece” – established “[c]ertain luxury items, such as vases, jewels, clothing, and tripods … as instruments of exchange in a noble form of trade” (Goux 126). The economic value of these items “remained integrated with the supernatural virtues imagined to be inherent in it” (Goux 126). Therefore, these objects would signify “not only wealth but sacred powers, social prestige, and ties of interpersonal dependence” (Goux 126). In contrast, in modern society, “the rational contrivance’ of legal tender [is] backed by allowing the old notion of value, charged with affective powers and religious assumptions, to be replaced by a notion of economic value which is free from interference, from the static of valorizing dimensions” (Goux 126, my italics). The history of this symbolism demonstrates that “currency introduces a segregation of values, setting economic value cleanly apart” (Goux 126). In contrast, St. Clair’s business appeals to “the old notion of value.” In other words, charity has not only economic value to the beggar and the giver, but also additional values, including those like religious duty and noblesse oblige, along with, as Goux observes, “social prestige, and ties of interpersonal dependence” (126). In sync with the de-segregation of the old notion of value from begging,¹⁰ St. Clair’s strategy to evoke pity and terror – “inspiring pity by my ghastly face” (Doyle 10) – was timely in that “[t]hroughout the first half of the nineteenth century all British governments were haunted, in varying degree, by the bogey of French Jacobinism” and “the nightmare of an angry mob sweeping into the capital from its poorest quarters continued to disturb the comfortable assurance of Victorian minds” (Palmer 74). As Marek underscores, St. Clair uses “the skill of make-up … to convert middle class guilt into cash as Hugh Boone” (108).

The real lesson of “The Fox and the Crow,” then, is not “every flatterer / Lives at the expense of him who listens” (qtd. in Shell 115), but that the old notion of value becomes less available when trading with currency, which segregates values. Based on the anti-opium propaganda, which presents the old notion of value, however, nineteenth-century Britain did not seem to learn this lesson from Aesop’s fable.
Where Literature Intersects with Global Politico-Economy: How St. Clair Reflects the British Empire’s Strategy

When Hugh Boone’s real identity as St. Clair is exposed, he makes an appeal to pity to avoid public exposure. St. Clair says to Holmes, “‘God help me, I would not have [my children] ashamed of their father. My God! What an exposure! What can I do?’” (Doyle 9-10). St. Clair’s appeal demonstrates that at the time, the “[l]aw, toxicology, and anti-opium propaganda brought opium and other narcotics into the category of poisons” (Harris 452). Categorizing opium as a poison could inspire pity, that is, because England is a victim, not a victimizer: “England is strung out on opium and cannot be held responsible for its actions” (Harris 455). Following Barry Milligan, Harris argues that, “when opium entered British discourse it quickly became a symbol of corruption and contagion” (453). It became a poison, a symbol of “alien contagion” (qtd. in Harris 449) later in the nineteenth century, “when anti-opium activists use[d] the drug itself to symbolize the moral corruption to which this imperial policy was exposing England” (Harris 454). “[T]he construction of opium as poison” gives the public a good excuse for the effects of the opium trade, since it “helps allay them by attaching the moral blight associated with the opium trade to the drug itself, which can then be reattached to the Orient…. The ‘incredible’ fact that ‘the British Government is actually implicated in such a trade’ (British Opium 3) thus becomes explicable” (Harris 454-55). The same rhetoric recurs in De Quincey’s Confessions as well: “This inhabitation of the position of feminized victim is crucial to De Quincey’s portrayal of himself: the English opium-eater is, above all, one who suffers. Moreover, this construction of autobiographical subjectivity lays the groundwork for a similar construction of English national identity” (Schmitt 68).

While Marck reads St. Clair and Holmes as “doubles” for the ways in which both use disguise and “exercise their own extraordinary creative abilities” (115), there are more doublings than Marck observes: De Quincey and Whitney as well as that involving St. Clair and the British Empire. Thus, like De Quincey, whose influence was directly cited, Whitney too is pitiable and “cannot be held responsible for his addiction.”
Likewise, while not addicted to opium itself, St. Clair is addicted to begging in order to maintain his lifestyle as a suburban gentleman, so much so that he fears public exposure. It is not a coincidence that St. Clair’s concern about his honor and reputation for his children’s sake echoes that of the British Empire; “F.S. Turner’s critique of the opium trade reflects not so much concern for China’s welfare as profound anxiety about Britain’s threatened claim to moral superiority” (Harris 454). The British Empire is concerned about its national image, about its honor and reputation.

Harris makes the point that “Holmes proves … the contagion the crime seems to imply never, in fact, existed” (460), which makes sense. Nonetheless, the crime’s seemingly “tangential relations with opium-smoking” (Harris 460) suggests that St. Clair’s business’s proximity to and similarity to that of the opium den and The East India Company gives weight to understanding St. Clair’s economic symbolism as more central. Baucom’s reading of global capital and global literary studies could suggest a way to navigate through the irregularities in the map of London, described above, recurring with the same logic as found in the global processes in Meek and Scott. Shell’s study helped to read commercial language in St. Clair’s begging business, and tie it to the law of global economy as found in Baucom. Goux’s point about the “old notion of value” in premonetary symbols enabled linking the use of Baucom’s and Shell’s ideas through the economic trade structure of St. Clair’s begging business. All in all, St. Clair turns out to be one of “the doings of global trade in miniature,” reflecting and embodying the global politico-economy in the late nineteenth-century London.

Global ‘Identity,’ the (Ir)Reducible Other, and Radical Hospitality

Significantly, Inspector Bradstreet acquits and releases St. Clair with a warning that “If the police are to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone” (Doyle 11). By reducing the difference in St. Clair/ Hugh Boone to the “identity” of a British gentleman, Doyle subsumes the Otherness or the particular into the universal, British
identity, and thereby safely closes the case. In so doing, Doyle also closes his eyes to St. Clair’s “doings of global trade in miniature,” which mirrors his double, the British Empire’s dependence on the Other in the global trade. Although Doyle thus marginalizes the British Empire’s dependence on the Other, Twisted Lip nonetheless discloses what Baker would call Britain’s “radically decentering experience of the Other and of dependence on the Other” (117). As St. Clair relied on his “confederate” (Doyle 5), the Lascar manager of the opium den, so that St. Clair could disguise himself as Hugh Boone in the opium den and keep running his begging business, so too the British Empire relied on China and India in the opium trade. As a liminal figure, St. Clair implicates the Other in his trade as well as standing between the Same and the Other, revealing that “identity and difference are mutually constitutive” (Baker 109). Doyle’s fiction thus prophetically speaks to the current refugee and migrant crisis and suggests Jacques Derrida’s unconditional hospitality. Derridean unconditional hospitality is based on Emmanuel Levinas’ “subjectivity [that] stems from the ego’s awareness that it is not sovereign but exists in a world that, far from being an extension of or coinciding with itself, it is fully dependent on” (Baker 117).

While the British middle class members reduce individuals to the Other in their limited terms of who are in need, they find themselves unwittingly patronizing St. Clair and encouraging St. Clair to become a beggar, leaving us to rethink who might be left out from those rescued in the current refugee and migrant crisis. A Derridean approach allows us to appreciate the dynamic between hospitality and those deemed to be in need. This approach may lead us to fully investigate the global logic which now prevails.

Notes:

1 With regard to “the tension between identity and difference in world politics,” see Baker 115.
2 Here, Baucom seems to draw on Fernand Braudel’s notion of longue durée or structural time. Braudel “criticized ‘event-dominated’ or episodic history” and “the search for timeless, eternal truths,” whereas he “insisted on two other social times … structural time (or long-lasting, but not eternal, basic structures that underlay historical systems), and the cyclical processes within the structures (or
medium-run trends, such as the expansions and contractions of the world-economy.” See Wallerstein 15.

3 As Marck shows, Michael Atkinson also locates St. Clair’s station near the Bank of England, itself near Exchange Alley: “Atkinson notes the proximity of Boone’s begging location in Threadneedle Street to the Bank of England” (Marck 109).

4 After checking Google and other maps of 19th century London on the internet, I estimated where Paul’s Wharf, Swan Lane, and Exchange Alley could be and entered them on the map provided by the Norton Anthology, by use of red and blue letters.

5 From the maps in Alan Palmer’s The East End, the East End starts approximately at the London Docks.

6 The existence of Old Swan Wharf, east of Swan Lane, dates back to 1848-51, at the latest (Harben), and Swan Lane is close to London Bridge. Therefore, it is plausible that Upper Swandam Lane could have been Swan Lane.

7 Susan Zieger argues that “[Fitz Hugh] Ludlow’s and other’s autobiographies illuminate how the hallucinatory inner space of subjectivity engaged the imperial tropes of travel, exploration, and conquest that governed nineteenth-century conceptualizations of geographic space” (1531).

8 The description of the opium den in Twisted Lip that Harris analyzes is as follows: “Between a slop shop and a gin shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search…. [B]y the light of a flickering oil lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the forecastle of an immigrant ship” (Doyle 1).

9 Based on Nietzsche, Shapiro observes that “[w]hen one gives alms, for which one expects no return whatsoever, one humiliates the objects of one’s charity by placing them in a situation that emphasizes their impotence and incapacity” (281). In St. Clair’s case, he could have taken advantage of this aspect to give his customers a sense of superiority.

10 I read St. Clair’s disguise as a disabled beggar as signifying his disassociating the conventional notion of value from business, since he presents his begging as for charity, not for a business.

Works Cited


Reviews

“Large migrations are our future”

“So the question is: What does a creepy neighbor want?”

(Slavoj Žižek)

Slavoj Žižek is one of the world’s best known philosophers and public intellectuals. He is exceptionally prolific, not always because he is popularly accessible, but because he has the ability to raise profound issues yet blend the questions these issues provoke into a charming mix of “high” and “low” culture, deadly seriousness with a “wink, wink” humor – even hilarity. Friedrich Nietzsche’s axiom, “It’s not true unless it makes you laugh at least once,” often provides him with his reigning method of political philosophy. The subject of Slavoj Žižek’s maiden lecture in Romania at the University of Bucharest’s Department of History in May, 1995, “On Totalitarian Laughter,” says it all.

*Against the Double Blackmail* is Žižek’s venture into recent developments currently tearing the European Union apart – immigration, refugees, terrorism, a beleaguered liberal-Left consensus and the rise of anti-immigrant populist nationalists. It is a small book but no less insightful for that. Žižek confronts these critical contemporary issues with what he calls, after Heidegger, “interpretive confrontation” – which, no less, raises the question, “What is Europe”? He does this with his trademark flair: namely, citing various contemporary and historical examples, literary figures (Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, Mary Shelley), films (by John Ford, Preston Sturges, Claude Lanzmann, Spike Lee, Quentin Tarantino), philosophers (Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Martin Heidegger, Walter Benjamin, Carl Schmitt, and his German contemporary, Peter Sloterdijk, to mention a few) and demonstrating his knowledge of a variety of religious traditions. This heady assemblage of authoritative personnel and crisp writing – almost conversational in tone – is often spiced with the psychoanalytic insights of Jacques Lacan.
A couple of his arguments stand out: 1) *Large migrations are our future* – whose cause is global capitalism and its geo-political machinations; and 2) *the usual Left-liberal sentimentality is not the solution.* (The “double blackmail” Žižek refers to in the title of this book and that which he vehemently urges we reject, is that presented by xenophobic, anti-immigrant right-wing populists, and the politically correct liberal Left. Interestingly, much of his animus is directed towards the latter, so that will be a focus here.)

**Large migrations are our future**

Here Žižek agrees with his young friend, fellow Slovenian and frontline reporter from every major conflict zone in the last 15 years in Central Asia, Southwest Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans and Africa, Bostjan Videmsek. Here is Žižek:

And there will be more migrations, not just because of armed conflicts, but because of new “rogue states”, economic crises, natural disasters, climate change…. The main lesson to be learned, therefore, is that humankind should get ready to live in a more ‘plastic’ and nomadic way: local or global changes in environment may result in the need for unheard-of large-scale social transformations and population movements. We are all more or less rooted in a particular way of life, protected by rights, but some historical contingency may all of a sudden throw us into a situation in which we are compelled to reinvent the basic coordinates of our way of life…. One thing is clear: in cases of such turmoil, national sovereignty will have to be radically redefined and new levels of global cooperation invented. (101-102)

Žižek’s argues that a solution lies in an attempt to “regulate the commons” and he insists that “one has to locate in historical reality the antagonisms that make this Idea a practical urgency.” So he asks, “[D]o we endorse the predominant acceptance of capitalism as a fact of (human) nature, or does today’s global capitalism contain enough strong antagonisms to prevent its indefinite reproduction?” (103). Žižek elaborates on four antagonisms (i.e. “commons” to be regulated) in the “world interior of capital” (Peter Sloterdijk’s phrase):
1) the looming threat of ecological catastrophe; 2) the more and more palpable failure of private property to integrate into its functioning … so-called ‘cognitive capital’, primarily language – our means of communication and education – (i.e. a broader definition of intellectual property) but also the shared infrastructure of public transport, electricity, mail etc.; 3) the socio-ethical implications of new techno-scientific developments (especially biogenetics); and last 4) but not least… the crucial one … addressing new forms of apartheid, new walls and slums – the antagonism of the Included and the Excluded. (106-107)

Žižek is an excellent guide through these “antagonisms,” what an earlier Marxist would have called “contradictions” – a term with a now rejected air of determinism about it. But ultimately, there are no obvious “agents of political change” who emerge who can be relied upon in Žižek’s account. His resuscitated notion of Communism (since the structure and development of world capitalism doesn’t dig its own grave, and pure “voluntarism” is unlikely to deliver these –public – goods) ends up malgre lui with a version of the pessimistic conclusion to Herbert Marcuse’s One-Dimensional Man (1964) when he quotes Walter Benjamin, “It is only for the sake of those without hope that hope is given to us.” It is unsatisfying (though not necessarily untrue) to have him conclude in his chapter “What Is To Be Done?” quoting Gandhi’s motto, “Be yourself the change you want to see in the world,” the Hopi saying, “We are the ones we have been waiting for,” the philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s “Thought is the courage of the hopeless,” and finally, “So let’s bring class struggle back – and the only way to do it is to insist on the global solidarity of the exploited and oppressed” (106-107, 110).

But wait. If it were only this withered light Žižek spreads on the most significant challenges facing Europe in a generation, maybe even going back to the end of World War II, most of us would not be reading him. Žižek is not so easily dismissed.

“So the question is: What does a creepy neighbor want?”

When Žižek gets away from the utopia of global solidarity stuff (emoticon), this little book is really quite original, provocative and, one is tempted to say, realistic. Of course he rejects the epidemic of authoritarian personalities raging throughout Central and Eastern Europe right now, reactionaries who constitute a right-wing, xenophobic, populist response
to immigration and terrorism. His answer may appear somewhat paradoxical: we must inoculate ourselves against the “pathetic solidarity with the refugees,” avoid the Beautiful Souls of the predictable Left liberals, and have a serious conversation, a philosophical look at the (new) “neighbors” (63). His chapters “Limits of the Neighborhood” and “Hateful Thousands in Cologne” may come as a shock to many readers.

Žižek’s arguments are deliberately provocative, but as philosopher Theodor Adorno once remarked, “In psychoanalysis only the exaggerations are true.” Žižek writes:

…one should take a closer philosophical look at the notion of the Neighbor. As Adam Kotsko has shown in his book Creepiness, ‘creepy’ is today’s name for the uncanny core of a neighbor: every neighbor is ultimately creepy. What makes a neighbor creepy are not his weird acts but the impenetrability of the desire that sustains these acts… So the question is: What does this creepy neighbor want?… An experience, an encounter, gets creepy when we all of a sudden suspect he is doing something for a motive other than the obvious one. (75)

In this vein, Žižek rejects the liberal Left humanist bromide, “We are all human,” the “underneath our cultural, religious and class differences we are all the same” argument for the idea of “the inhuman Neighbor” (76-77). This is a version of the famous Lacanian psychoanalytic rejection of (the usual interpretation of) the Christian injunction, “Love thy neighbor as thy self,” because, frankly, as Jacques Lacan’s argument goes, “you will never really know your neighbor, your neighbor doesn’t even know himself, and you don’t even know yourself – you are a creepy neighbor too!” Žižek argues because one can never really have full access to the other, one should recognize the important role that alienation plays in maintaining the day-to-day fabric of a society. Racisms occur when one presumes full access to the other’s (excessive) desires (sex, wealth, sloth, strange music, etc.) which then gives rise to jealousy and hatred. “In jealousy,” Žižek writes, “the subject creates or imagines a paradise (a utopia of full jouissance) from which he is excluded” (75). So Žižek agrees with many psychoanalytically informed political thinkers, going back at least to Harold Lasswell’s World Politics and Personal Insecurity (1935) and others, notably Sloterdijk. His conclusion:
Perhaps the lesson to be learned is that, sometimes, a dose of alienation is indispensable for the peaceful coexistence of ways of life. Sometimes alienation is not a problem but a solution. Sometimes, alienation is like alcohol for Homer Simpson: “the cause of, and the solution to, all life’s problems!” (74-75)

Besides, what if getting to know your neighbor meant that you find out that you don’t like him?! Then, feeling your empathy has been cheated, you turn against your new (Muslim) neighbor adding fuel to the already burning resentments of the anti-immigrant right-wing populists? One must cut the link between the immigrants/ migrants/ refugees and humanitarian empathy, insists Žižek (wink, wink, se non è vero, è ben trovato). The following paragraph is “vintage Žižek”:

Universality is a universality of “strangers,” of individuals reduced to the abyss of impenetrability in relation not only to others but also to themselves. When dealing with foreigners, we should always bear in mind Hegel’s concise formula: the secrets of the ancient Egyptians were secret also for the Egyptians themselves. That’s why the privileged way to reach a Neighbor is not that of empathy, of trying to understand them, but a disrespectful laughter which makes fun both of them and of us in our mutual lack of (self-)understanding (inclusive of “racist” jokes). (79)

Žižek continues this argument as he considers at some length Alenka Zupancić’s analysis of Preston Sturges’ film Gulliver’s Travels (1941), which is read against the films of American director Frank Capra and his enduring motif of the goodness of the poor neighbor, or the “average Joe.” This is a form of condescension, according to Žižek, because there is nothing redemptive about being a victim, nothing necessarily virtuous or lovable about being an excluded other. Just like there is nothing redeeming about the monster in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, when Shelley allows the monster to speak for himself. He remains a monster (17).

The reason refugees and our neighbors deserve our help is not because we get to know them, decide “they are just like us,” “we feel their pain,” “and so on” (a favorite Žižek trope): “We should, rather, help them because it is our ethical duty to do so, because we cannot do otherwise if we want to remain decent people…. displays of generosity make us feel good but they should also make us suspicious: are we doing this to forget what is required?” (82).
So Žižek ends up making a very Kantian argument – his is an ethics based on reason (and justice) not the “pathologies” of the human heart; virtue then is its own reward. Is this humanly possible? It might require an ethical subject on the order of Nietzsche’s Übermensch to be motivated by such a demanding “philosophy of the migrant,” our neighbor.

In the end, Žižek is saying that it is not as simple as just trying to love, understand, or tolerate these ‘others’. (There is an ‘other’ in all of us, we are more ‘other’ to ourselves than we know, we are not entirely who we think we are, nor do we really know what we are capable of). Offer them a place in the neighborhood – and a common struggle for a positive universal project (100).

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Notes:

1 Bostjan Videmsek, 21st Century Conflicts: Remnants of War(s): Bostjan Videmsek, Borovnica, Slovenia, 2013; Videmsek, Bostjan, Auf Der Flucht: Moderner Exodus ins gelobte Land, Germany: Klak, 2016; and personal interview with the author, December 2015, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

“The settled person has a clear and distinct concept of historical time, but one that falsifies the concrete experience of time. Only after we have broken out of our walls, which tag us with three coordinates and the coordinate of date, will we be able to experience time again.”

(Vilem Flusser)

Vilem Flusser is just beginning to be discovered in the English-speaking world thanks to a spate of recent translations. *The Freedom of the Migrant* is a collection of his essays and articles from the 1970s through the early 1990’s. A German-Jewish philosopher from Prague, Flusser fled the Nazis via London to Brazil where he wrote a daily newspaper column, took up a professorship in the “philosophy of communications” at the University of Sao Paulo, and returned to live in France in 1972. He died in a car crash outside of Prague in 1991. He wrote in several languages; the selections in this volume have all been translated into English from German. His work is best known in the German-speaking world.

Like all of Flusser’s works (with which this reviewer is familiar), *The Freedom of the Migrant* is a challenging, sometimes bewildering, but ultimately engaging and deeply rewarding experience.¹ His philosophy is angled, it has a kind of chiascuro effect; it’s quirky, non-systematic, and oddly addictive – like being mesmerized by the stage design of a German Expressionist film. He is a kind of German Roland Barthes or Germanic Marshall McLuhan. And like Barthes and McLuhan, he is at home in a variety of disciplines: communications and information theory, philosophy, philosophy of science, religion, the sociology of culture.

As one might guess from the title, *The Freedom of the Migrant*, this book is not really about the predicament and dire straits of migrants and
refugees fleeing civil war, collapsed states, political persecution, drought, famine and disease. Flusser is for the most part discussing, in highly original terms, what presages so much contemporary work on globalization and communication studies – even “post-human studies” – i.e. hybrid communities, media extensions of the self, and fluid, “nomadic” identities, what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls “the dimensions of global cultural flows” and catalogues as ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes (33-43). But this apparent evasion of the “real migrant” is only partly true; in fact, his thesis appears to be even more radical:

People are generally expelled from someplace to nowhere in particular. If they don’t perish in the process, they become immigrants somewhere. Even though expulsions have occurred ever since human beings became settled, they remain horrific. All three phases of the process are unsettling: being expelled, wandering in the void, and finally, being beached somewhere. The first phase unsettles us out of the ground that supports our reality; the second exposes us to unreality; the third transports us into an unacceptable second-degree reality. This desettling and unsettling are usually viewed negatively…. I will try to tease the positive aspects from them. (25)

If we only consider some of his more striking conclusions in the light of – how can we not?! – the current brutality and hopelessness of the refugee situations in Europe and throughout the world, this “positive” approach to migrants and refugees is, frankly, a maddeningly, “arch” perspective. (It reminds one of the precautionary tale concerning the fate of the first known philosopher in the western world – Thales – who died falling down a well while gazing at the heavens.) Flusser writes:

What I mean is that we may easily recognize ourselves in the expellee and his unsettledness. They are just like us, except more so. We also experience three phases: the loss of ground under our feet, the unreality around us and within us, and the unacceptable second-degree reality. We merely experience these in less obvious ways. And so we may perhaps say the following: the expellees whom we occasionally see on television show us that to which we would do well to aspire. (27)

This reasoning all started in the little chapter, “To Be Unsettled, One First Has To Be Settled”: “Truly rooted and settled people (to the extent they
exist in reality and not just ideology) are experientially impoverished shrubs. To be a human in the true sense of the word, one has to be unsettled” (25). And, because Aristotle said, “the starting point of philosophy has always been unsettledness” (qtd. in Flusser 25). (But suppose we continued with Martin Heidegger’s ontological “thrownness” of Being (Geworfenheit), or Novalis’ “philosophy is really homesickness”?!? Profound perhaps, but weak tea for hard times for those migrants who are not philosophers.) So unless we are in the realm of Flusser’s “telematic society” (67), “taking residence in homelessness” (1), i.e. the migrant’s life, might not be all that liberating. But isn’t this “philosophy of the migrant” from the empyrean heights hard to square with Flusser’s own life in which he himself was at one time or another (“concretely,” as the philosophers say) a persecuted minority, a refugee, migrant, emigrant and immigrant?

So how do we square this circle? One way is simply conclude that Flusser would not really understand that 16 year-old Syrian boys in a refugee camp are asking a very different question about “unsettledness” when they approach an aid worker with, “Where am I?” than are those watching the refugee flow on television. One might conclude that Flusser’s habitat is in a postmodern “telematic society”, a “neuro-sphere” and a “cyber-democracy” (all his terms) of his own making. One could conclude he is a nomad in theory only, “peering outside without becoming wet” – what the Greeks called theoria: knowledge without danger or direct experience (56). On the other hand, one might work with his theories, not just to try to understand the contradiction between his biography and some of his seemingly oblivious pronouncements about the freedom of unsettledness, but actually to – in a philosophically pragmatic way – make them work in the contemporary – not timeless – circumstances of the refugee and the migrant.

Flusser is addressing the transformations of communities and nations on a global scale which are unsettling our ideas about political sovereignty and personal and group identities. So while he often operates at a high level of generalization, those observing the situation of migrants and refugees today will notice that after the food and blankets are distributed in the philanthropic societies’ tents, 12-year-old refugees pull out and giggle over their smart phones just like their contemporaries at dining room tables all over the world. One can easily imagine research on
the use of social media “on the run.” Flusser even devotes an entire chapter to the phenomenological meaning of tents,

…we are in the process of losing the roofs over our heads… Given [our conventional] definitions of wall and roof, we can actually count on higher levels of homelessness, for we are everywhere tearing down walls, either because they impede traffic or because they get in the way of the free flow of people, goods or information. Roofs supported by solid walls don’t have much of a future. However, such a limited meaning of roof is itself a consequence of the limiting quality of walls. Once solid walls have fallen, we will more likely think “canvas” when we speak of roof and wall. Within this expanded sense of the word, there is no room for homelessness. This expanded sense, however, will require that architects transform their ways of thinking. They will have to think more in terms of tents than houses. (59)

Flusser continues – again, almost like the semiology of a Roland Barthes – discussing tents and related phenomena like umbrellas, parasols, parachutes, Genghis Khan’s yurts, (biblical) Jacob’s tents, circus tents, tents as a wall for moving pictures: “…thanks to the processing that takes place in its membrane … the tent wall billowing in the wind, gathers experiences, processes them, and then passes them on. It is because of its wall that the tent is such a nest of creativity” (59-64).

Now Wendy Brown, in her book, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty, would have much to say in this discussion, especially the current phenomenon of walling and fencing as a response to the eroded sense of nation-state sovereignty unleashed by the forces of globalization. Flusser, for his part, undoubtedly would continue to act as visionary or prophet of post-history, post-humanism and “superseding the Neo-lithic” (53-54). The titles to the chapters in The Freedom of the Migrant are deceptively journalistic, when in fact they are anything but so straightforward and “readerly,” and decidedly more like philosophical journeys: “The Challenge of the Migrant,” “On the Alien,” “We Need a Philosophy of Emigration,” “Nomads,” “Building Houses,” “Does the French Nation Exist?” and so on.

There is much to be learned from Flusser’s book. It is a challenge, to say the least, to find much freedom as we conventionally understand the concept, in the experience of the migrant or refugee. But Flusser
apparently did. And he makes an intriguing case for it. In the end, he would say, “The settled possess; the wanderer experiences” (41).

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Notes:


3 Personal experience, Dobova refugee camp, Slovenia, November 26, 2015.

4 Ibid.


Andrew S. Gross’s book, *The Pound Reaction. Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature*, is not actually a Pound monograph. Better said, it is one – but not only that. Indeed, taking Pound’s case as its starting point, it aims at much more than just re-reading Pound’s poetry – even though this would have already been a major and applaudable task. But Gross’s ambition is much higher: his study sets as a goal the examination of the Bildung of a whole cultural context, the formation of the post-war Zeitgeist in American literary studies. More precisely, his book tries to answer not a single question (“What does Pound’s poetry look like if re-read now?”), but a whole set of questions, which the author explicitly asks early on his study:

The questions I ask are: How did postwar writers understand Pound’s politics in relation to his poetics? Where did they place Pound in relation to existing cultural and legal institutions? Where was he located in the shifting political and cultural alliances of the Cold War? Where did midcentury writers locate themselves in relation to the arguments, institutions, and politics of the postwar cultural landscape? (36)

As one can already see from these questions, what Gross intends to do is see how Pound’s poetics and politics influenced the poetics and politics of the Cold War intellectuals – and how they had thus a decisive influence on the construction of what Gross calls “the liberal aesthetic,” which he finds definitive for contemporary American culture.

Before seeing in detail how Gross thinks that these influences took place and shape, I must pause for a moment and revere his intellectual courage; discussing so openly the relation between Pound’s writing and his political madness is still a highly delicate and flammable undertaking. I experienced this myself at the Rotterdam poetry festival last year, when, after presenting the project of the Romanian Pound edition which I have been translating, under the coordination of Romania’s foremost essayist and philosopher, Horia-Roman Patapievici, I elicited two types of
reactions: either radical enthusiasm, or radical enragement. For half of the audience, Pound was a wonderful poet, the very inventor of poetic modernity, whose political dementia did not count at all; for the other half, he was a Fascist scoundrel, whose poetic skills were at best an alibi, and at worst an aggravating circumstance. What I find most remarkably courageous in Gross’s approach is his subtle and yet straightforward lucidity of understanding and stating clearly that, in Pound’s case, his poetics and his politics are indeed inseparable – they originate in each other, they influence each other, and the best empirical proof that they stand or fall together is the fact that, as soon as Pound’s politics failed and ended, his poetry failed and ended too.

Embracing this position also means that one admits that there existed a precious prelapsarian portion of Pound’s poetics which, prior to and against his political madness, has shaped and defined American poetics. Banal as it may seem, this rational and poised position also elicits hysterical anti-Pound reactions even from great minds, such as Harold Bloom’s, par exemple. Now, Bloom’s anti-Poundian vein is notorious; his aversion is already manifest in The Anxiety of Influence, his 1973 book, where his Freudian morphogenetical theory of poetry from Shakespeare to Hart Crane lists all Pound’s significant contemporaries, Eliot, Williams, Stevens, Crane etc., but fails to mention Pound at all. (As a matter of fact, it does once – when it cites from a letter sent by Stevens to Richard Eberhart, where Pound’s name is mentioned. But it is not Bloom’s intention to bring him into discussion – and he never does it in any part of the book, actually). And this aversion is also manifest in Bloom’s monumental panorama of English poetry – where Pound, even though discussed extensively in terms of poetic ideology, is only present with two minor poems, A Pact and Planh for the Young English King (which makes Pound the most underrepresented poet in Bloom’s anthology, placed on the same level with ultra-minor poets such as Isaac Rosenberg or Trumbull Stickney, who, for that matter, are also present with two poems each). Eliot, on the other hand, is given twenty pages, more than any other modern poet (two pages more than Wallace Stevens, Bloom’s favourite besides Hart Crane). Pound is the daemonic figure (a daemonic absence, as a matter of fact) of Bloom’s monumental anthology. He is simply “not humanly acceptable.”
The aversion has in the meantime turned into a hysterical reaction in Bloom’s otherwise wonderful book from last year, *The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and the American Sublime*. While openly saying that it does not attempt to present an American canon, the book nevertheless attempts to be the American canon itself, “the dozen creators of the American sublime,” as Bloom straightforwardly puts it:

This book is about the dozen creators of the American Sublime. Whether these are our most enduring authors may be disputable, but then this book does not attempt to present an American canon. ... Yet my own selection seems more central, because these writers represent our incessant effort to transcend the human without forsaking humanism.

This book, “more central” than a canon, in Bloom’s own words, pairs these twelve essential American writers in six doublets: Whitman and Melville, Emerson and Emily Dickinson, Hawthorne and Henry James, Mark Twain and Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot, Faulkner and Hart Crane. Even though Eliot is present in this canonical dozen, one immediately notices the contemptuous tone in Bloom’s critical commentary: those who dare admire his poetry are even accused, at one particular point, of participating “in murderous attitudes towards Jews and Judaism”:

Despite this achieved splendor, what is most humane in me just does not allow more than a cold admiration. Stevens has helped me to live my life, while Eliot brings out the worst in me. ... I dismiss the exegetes who defend him and Ezra Pound; at best they are misguided, at worst they participate in murderous attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. We do not read only as aesthetes – though we should – but also as responsible men and women. By that standard, Eliot, despite his daemonic gift, is unacceptable once and for all time. (Bloom, *The Daemon* 402)

It is quite surprising to see that the aversion is now also directed towards Eliot – both poets have become now “unacceptable,” they both “bring out the worst” in Bloom, they are now both “not humanly acceptable,” to use Bloom’s words from his monumental and yet idiosyncratic poetic panorama.

I have mentioned Bloom’s case just to show the idiosyncrasies with which the Pound scholar has to contend if he is willing to take Pound’s
poetry seriously alongside his politics. Of course, there are also important critics who dare to see Pound as a central poet of modernity – sometimes the central poet of American modernity, as Marjorie Perloff sees him, for example. Unlike Bloom, for whom Pound is at best an absence (and usually simply a bête noire), for Perloff Pound is the very poet responsible for the radical divide of American literary studies; as she puts it, the fundamental split parting the academic rivalries has Pound as its epicentre:

This is neither an idle quarrel nor a narrow sectarian war between rival academics (e.g. Bloom, Hillis Miller, Helen Vendler, Frank Kermode in the Stevens camp; Kenner, Donald Davie, Guy Davenport, Christine Brooke-Rose among Poundians) who just happen to have different literary and political allegiances. This split goes deep, and its very existence raises what I take to be central questions about the meaning of Modernism – indeed about the meaning of poetry itself in current literary history and theory.6

Thus, while Pound is an absence (or a “humanly unacceptable” presence) for Bloom, he is the origin of “the Pound tradition” for Perloff. As I was saying in the beginning, Gross’s endeavour has to navigate between radical rejections and radical enthusiasms. And it is remarkable to see how subtly and intelligently he manages to build up his case. He starts from the 1949 Bollingen Prize – which was famously granted to Ezra Pound, then an inmate of St. Elisabeth’s psychiatric ward. Pound was at the time a war criminal, charged with treason, but who – found mentally unfit to stand trial – was institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital with a military regime. The scandal was unavoidable – and Pound was defended by his supporters with the argument of free speech; ironically, a fascist poet was thus made “the symbol of democratic culture, a prisoner the spokesman of free speech” (1). Gross’s thesis is that the aftermath of this scandal, which involved the relation between poetry and politics, helped create what Gross calls “the liberal aesthetic,” or the separation of the poetic from the political (213).

Gross structures his book as a diptych: in its first part, he builds a theory of this liberal aesthetic, as constructed in the interventions contemporary with or subsequent to the 1949 Bollingen Prize scandal; the second part comprises six essays devoted to seven writers, all of them representing an essential piece in the construction of this “liberal
aesthetic.” The seven writers are (in the order in which they are discussed in the book) Ezra Pound, Karl Shapiro, W.H. Auden, Peter Viereck (a writer almost forgotten now, but curiously significant for Gross’s case study), Katherine Anne Porter and Leslie Fiedler (taken together in this fifth essay) and John Berryman. I will discuss in what follows, in this fatally limited review, the theory of the “liberal aesthetic,” leaving aside the illustrative essays – which are all convincing and quite well-informed. (Bibliographically speaking, the only important flaw I could detect was the absence of Philip Coleman’s superb book on John Berryman – which, discussing Berryman’s “public vision,”7 namely his concern with the public sphere, not only challenges the dominant confessional labelling, but also profoundly rhymes with the demonstration Gross is making in his own book. It really is a pity that these two books did not get to communicate – even though Coleman mentions twice Gross’s 2009 article on Berryman.)

Gross uses as the starting point of his demonstration William Barrett’s identification of the crux of the issue: “How far is it possible, in a lyric poem, for technical embellishments to transform vicious and ugly matter into beautiful poetry?” (9). The tension of the Cold War contributes to the creation of a cultural and political context which is favourable, in particular, to the transformation of a fascist poet into a symbol of free speech and aesthetic autonomy, and in general to the radical separation and even excision of the political from the poetic. Literature was separated, almost brutally, from the politics – just like “Pound was separated from his poetry” (20). With the institutionalization of Pound, literary studies were in their turn institutionalized; with the depoliticization of Pound, literature and the methodology of literary studies were depoliticized.

This is, in a nutshell, how the liberal aesthetic was built – from the separation of politics from literature, in an attempt to build “an institutional space” which would “secure freedom from the threat of totalitarianism” (23). A “postwar cultural landscape” is thus constructed in which “lyrical individuation was linked to the institutionalization of Pound (in a mental hospital) and of literary studies (in universities)” (37). Catalyzed by the Bollingen Prize scandal and the reaction (either positive or negative) to Pound’s poetics and politics, an enormous argument was built, stating that literature had to be separate from politics in a free
society. As the poets and critics involved in the construction of this argument were almost all academics, the result was that “the modernism that established itself in universities soon began to seem more bureaucratic than revolutionary” (130). This is the final point of the liberal aesthetic – which has succeeded in isolating the dangerous politics from art at the price of transforming itself into a bureaucratic language.

It is most interesting to observe that the anti-communist discourse of the Cold War in the United States is extensively coincident with what liberal writers captive in the communist countries in Eastern Europe strived to do, facing serious and sometimes fatal risks: namely to keep art separate from politics. The return to personal lyricism (namely what Pound was supposedly doing in *The Pisan Cantos*) was something forbidden in communist countries; totalitarian regimes put into act an elimination of the private space and of the secret (Derrida: “If a right to a secret is not maintained, then we are in a totalitarian space”); therefore, private and secretive lyricism had no right to exist in the cultural space in communism. Poetry *had* to be political in communist regimes; “political” meaning, in this case, not against the system, but glorifying it. The general reaction of all important writers captive in communist totalitarianisms was to slyly avoid, by all stylistic means, the compulsory political writing and to aim at the reconstruction of a personal lyricism. Coming from another direction, these anti-communist writers captive within the European communisms shared the same ideal – namely that of building an institutional space which would secure freedom from the threat of totalitarianism; of creating a strange sort of cultural autonomy in a space where all autonomy was denied.

Matei Călinescu, the American literary theorist originating from Romania, has written in his memoirs about this generalized “horror of politics.” He observes that communism, despite its obsessive insistence on politics and on pan-politicization, has as a result a “genuine political lobotomy,” a “severe atrophy of the political sense.” For almost two decades, more precisely from 1948 to 1964, this political lobotomy was the leading rule of the Romanian literary system. The emancipation from the pan-politicization and the transition to a sort of “liberal aesthetic” (insofar as it was possible within a totalitarian space) took about ten years – and it was perhaps the main cultural war inside the Romanian communism. Eventually, after the mid-1960s, Romanian literary studies
managed to build that institutional space which kept literature almost separate from the intrusions of communist politics; it was not called “the liberal aesthetic,” but rather “the autonomy of the aesthetic”; nevertheless, its profound meaning was exactly that described by Gross in his apt book: the separation of the art from politics, in order to preserve the personal freedom of the artist.

It is obvious now that Gross’s book is not a Pound monograph per se. Instead, it is the monograph of a cultural war – the first (and maybe the most important) cultural war after the end of World War II –, having as an objective the edification of an autonomy of the aesthetic in relation to politics. This cultural war was a successful attempt to “refuse the study for their politque,” as Emerson wrote in a wonderful poem 170 years ago; and it made possible the transition from a lyrical individualism to a lyricism of identity. It is a cultural war which was not specific to the United States only, and not to liberal cultures only, as we have seen; it has instated in its right “the free speech argument which distinguished poetry from politics in the name of liberal individualism” (227), “the free speech equation between lyricism and liberalism” (230) called by Gross “the liberal aesthetic” (and dubbed as “the autonomy of the aesthetic” in the East-European tradition); and it was probably the cultural war necessary for all cultures trying to enter postmodernity. It was the first postmodern cultural war; and it has constructed a massive cultural continuity, making possible the reinitiation of a major dialogue after it was brutally interrupted by the war.

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Notes:

1 The Romanian edition of Pound, due to be published by the Humanitas publishing house, is designed by Patapievici to comprise four volumes, for which I will provide the translation and Patapievici the critical apparatus. So far, only the first volume has been published: Ezra Pound, *Opere I. Poezii 1908-1920 / Works I. Poems 1908-1920*, ed. by Horia-Roman Patapievici, transl. by Mircea Ivănescu and Radu Vancu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015). The second volume, comprising *ABC of Reading and Guide to Kulchur*, is currently forthcoming.
Volumes 3 and 4 will comprise *The Cantos*, and perhaps a 5th volume will contain a selection of Pound’s essays.


4 “Pound's major poetic work is *The Cantos*, which seem to me to anthologize badly, nor do I have much esteem for them, or for Pound, whether as a person or poet. ... The Cantos contain material that is not humanly acceptable to me” (Bloom, *The Best Poems* 858-859).


8 Qtd. in Zadie Smith, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011. 103). In the same respect, see also the acute observation of Alain Finkielkraut: “The great contribution of modern times to civilization was the art of separation: the separation of Church and state, the separation of civil society and the political community, the separation of public and private life” (Alain Badiou and Alain Finkielkraut, *Confrontation. A Conversation with Aude Lancelin*. Cambridge & Malden: Polity Press, 2014. 89).

9 See Matei Călinescu, *Itaca*, in Matei Călinescu and Ion Vianu, *Amintiri în dialog / Memories in Dialogue*, (Iași: Polirom, 1998. 280). Călinescu had also written in his diary that, after his emigration to the United States in 1973, he was shocked to see the American academics insisting so much on the political nature of literature. He had fled away from a country and a literature intoxicated by politics in order to enter a free country and a free literature just as interested in them. It took him a whole decade (as he writes in another diary entry) to understand that the political nature of literature was something completely different than what he was taught in Romania: it was about reactivity and courage, about reacting to a system, instead of adulating and glorifying it. See Matei Călinescu, *Un fel de jurnal / A Kind of Diary* (Iași: Polirom, 2005).

10 This cultural war in communist Romania was most eloquently documented in two massive studies: M. Nițescu, *Sub zodia proletcultismului. Dialectica puterii / Under the Sign of Proletcultism. The Dialectics of Power* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995); Alex Goldiș, *Critica in tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului / Criticism in the Trenches. From Socialist Realism to the Autonomy of the Aesthetic* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2011). Goldiș’s book is the most precise and informed reconstruction of this cultural war, excavating from the archives of those dark times all the necessary pieces of the puzzle.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. What then is the worth of a single authentic picture, one destined to illuminate the ‘window of a soul’ from within? In answer to the metaphysical question, art historian Alexander Nemerov sets off on a revealing journey of craft and unadulterated emotion, digging deep into the archive of Lewis Hine’s memorable collection of child labour photographs. It is an assiduous, arduous task involving painstaking research, meticulous analysis, infinite care and attention to fine detail. A pioneering figure in documentary photography. Lewis Wickes Hine (1874-1940) was a committed social egalitarian thinker, who deeply believed in the power of photography as a moral and an educational medium, devoting his life to photographing child labour. Through WWI and the Great Depression, Hine documented the precarious, inhuman conditions of child labours in textile mills, coal mines and factories. His pictures that appeared in numerous sociological publications such as *The Survey* are impressive work portraits that capture the very quintessence of exploitative cheap labour. Working to the point of exhaustion, in often dangerous settings, to ensure optimal light and angles, Hine took risks and went to great lengths to immortalise steel and glass labourers, spinners and cotton mills child workers, the anaesthetised faces of the child workers he portrayed sending a disquieting message about the dehumanising effect of poverty. Endowed with a unique eye for rendering vulnerability and mutability, Hine went beyond the factual representation featuring in photojournalism. Whether what he portrayed was scenes of the relief work of the American Red Cross, or of the site of the Empire State Building at the moment of erecting its antenna spire, Hine went beyond the mere creation of vivid testimonials, eliciting the powerful story behind the image. A whole universe of anguish and misery thus opens up to the viewer, who partakes of the experience of the remarkable encounter between photographer and subject. Commending the poignant tales constitutive of Hine’s art, Nemerov retraces with eloquence and religious systematicity Hine’s work as staff photographer
at the Russell Sage Foundation of New York, and for the National Child Labour Committee. The author conveys a convincing and insightful sense of the extraordinary value of Hine’s legacy. Had it not been for Hine’s dedication and protestant ethic, Nemerov aptly illustrates, memorable records – forming an integral part of US cultural history – would be lost. And so would the now iconic image of that poster child Addie Card, leaning on her spinning frame. Emanating a mix of resignation, stare and silence, Addie Card was to become a symbol of the stark reality of the American dream, her portrait appearing on postage stamps, documenting a mystical moment in time:

But this naturalist detailing is only a baseline in Hine’s photograph. It is not the kind of time he most wants to show. Factory time is the machinery that gets the photograph into operation – the power of thrumming naturalist storytelling (victimized worker, nefarious machinery, endless hours, pointless labour) – but all of this is only a grease works allowing a more important time to emerge as a puff of inexplicable steam. Who knows but that the catatonic dreariness, the loud noise of the spindles, is even a requirement for the school-less child to be sufficiently instructed in weariness, sufficiently lost or disoriented, to allow some other and more mystical time to flitter into the scene. (Nemerov 4-5)

Highly perceptive, Nemerov does a fine job interpreting for the reader the profoundly mystical quality of Hine’s art, the ineffable in the gaze of a nameless little girl, a Cinderella ‘once upon a time’. Indeed a gaze worth a thousand words. It is this naked, “nameless affect” (11) manifest in “an empty sea of time” (4) that interests Nemerov in his reading of Hine, photography as the ultimate expression of “the liberation of the soul” (Spargo qtd. in Nemerov 1) in a timeless time one associates with artistic immortality. Nemerov combines accurate, minute descriptions with passionate technical analyses, shedding new, meaningful light on Hine’s work as an organic, unitary project of historical significance. While doing justice to the exemplary manner in which Hine succeeds in portraying social injustice, struggle, illiteracy, inequality, Nemerov concentrates on the spiritual dimension of Hine’s legacy. And it is an approach of great merit. For above all, Soulmaker is not about a genre or mode of photography; nor about a legendary documentarist. It is a timely reminder of the enduring depth and breadth of visual
representation, one that is particularly telling in the day and age of the selfie.

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Approaching Shakespeare’s work from the perspective of its contemporary visual culture, *Shakespeare and the Visual Imagination* testifies to Stuart Sillars’s programmatic undertaking to explore the complex relationship between visual arts and the Shakespearean canon. If in the previously published books, *Shakespeare and the Victorians* (2013), *Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians. A Pictorial Exploration* (2012), *The Illustrated Shakespeare 1709-1875* (2008), and *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as Critic, 1720-1820* (2006), Sillars analysed the visual reinvention, reinterpretation, and record of Shakespeare’s plays in the works of eighteenth-century and Victorian artists, the volume under review interrogates the dynamics between coeval modes of literary and visual representation with a view to understanding the ways in which the visual culture of the day influenced the composition of Shakespeare’s plays and narrative poems, thus broadening our understanding of the Bard’s sources, creative process, and perspective on the visual identity of the theatre.

Beginning with an insightful survey of the allegorical schemes, the allusive character, and the complex symbolism of the visual culture of the Tudor period (emblems, engravings, compositions, portraits, frontispieces, Architectural designs and other forms of visual expression), the book moves on to explore Shakespeare’s “particular way of weaving visual forms and ideas into the textual and performative fabric” (30). For example, the discussion of the conceptual structure of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Chapter 2) focuses on the two brief Induction scenes that, in Sillars’s opinion, testify to Shakespeare’s appropriation of the tradition of visual arts, his “knowledge of, and fascination with, the workings of word and image” (54). The allusions to the artificial nature of the image in the first Induction are construed as an “exposition of aesthetic falsehoods in theatre and visual art” (36), while the ekphrastic lines in the second Induction scene are related to their potential visual sources. Thus, the
reading of the play extends into the reading of images and of the assorted network of implications. Central to this discussion is the interplay between the competing notions of identity and representation.

Similar methodological strategies are applied in the next six chapters: poems and plays are read in connection with visual elements and compositional practice. Looking into the structural organization of Shakespeare’s poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* (Chapter 3) from the perspective of visual composition transforms their reading into that of “a Renaissance multitemporal narrative painting” (76). The poems are admired for their compositional balance, particularly when poised against each other. The analysis of these two poems also touches on the discussion about “truth and deceit in art and writing” (93), a key aspect that becomes a common denominator in the exploration of other Shakespearean texts in the chapters that follow. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (Chapter 4), Sillars avers, the influence of the tradition of visual arts is stronger than in *The Taming of the Shrew*, in that it also shapes the play’s stage organisation. The increased use of techniques of visual representation is related to the development of landscape painting and to the symbolic value that landscapes had acquired. An insightful approach to *Richard II* (Chapter 5) reveals the triadic structure of the play, thus challenging previous, more simplistic critical perspectives. In Sillars’s words,

The play is built on three compositional forms. ... The three forms are the notion of anamorphic painting and the importance of seeing from the right viewpoint; a single devotional painting that, extravagant in medium and assertive in symbolism, reveals elements essential to the nature of kinship; and the perspectival centrality of the monarch. The first functions almost as a symbolic key to the play’s operation; the second is the basis of a series of increasingly complex, increasingly multivalent presentations; and the third is, in thetic as well as painterly form, a structure that enfolds the entire action in its composition and the belief system it enacts. (134)

Similarly complex and well-argued is the analysis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Chapter 6. It explores the elaborate interplay of text, image, and performance in a play appreciated as “a display of compositional and referential sprezzatura equal to anything in visual or verbal art of its time” (164).
The following two chapters no longer centre on a single text, but focus on the development and manipulation of various visual forms and conventions. Chapter 7, for instance, tackles the deployment of painterly tropes, emblematic images, elements, and processes, and the reordering of visual composition in several Shakespearean plays. Chapter 8 looks into plays that show a more subtle engagement with various traditions of visual representation. The discussion begins with the analysis of the “exchange between the Poet and the Painter in *Timon of Athens*” (234) and then moves towards a perceptive analysis of the sophisticated relationship between the visual and the textual rhetoric in Shakespeare’s later plays, centring on ethopoetic strategies. Finally, the last chapter of the book situates the research within the panoply of approaches to the Shakespearean work, summarises the major points of each chapter, and concludes the discussion of Shakespeare’s aesthetic engagement.

Clearly organized, logically structured, and beautifully illustrated, Stuart Sillars’s *Shakespeare and the Visual Imagination* is a well-documented and insightful study. The importance of the research stems from the fact that it approaches Shakespeare’s work from within the broader tradition of visual and conceptual aesthetics, thus enlarging the perspective on the Shakespearean canon and opening up new ways of engaging his plays and poems. Such an approach allows a better grasp of the intricate network of allusions and concerns in Shakespeare’s work and a better understanding of Shakespeare’s exploration of the artificiality and self-referential potential of the work of art.

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To respond to the increasing demands of ‘acceleration’ in the twenty-first
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