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OUR NEIGHBOURS, OURSELVES

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON SURVIVAL

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Our Neighbours, Ourselves

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De Gruyter

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Contemporary Reflections on Survival

> It is injustice, not justice, which
> brings us into normative politics;
> despotism, not freedom. Moral political
> theory should start with negative
> politics: the politics that informs us on
> how to tackle evil before it tells us how
> to pursue the good.
> (Margalit, 2004, p. 187)

Almost two decades ago, Julia Kristeva ended her book on the "problem of the foreigner" with these words:

> [W]e are, for the first time in history, confronted with the following situation…. A paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners…. In France, at the end of the twentieth century, each is fated to remain the same *and* the other—without forgetting his original culture but putting it in perspective to the extent of having it not only exist side by side but also alternate with others' culture. (Kristeva, 1991, pp. 194–5)

These words have stayed with me over the years, as I have reflected on the rich lives of "paradoxical communities" who have lived side-by-side; worked at the intersections of different beliefs; laboured in the interstices of emergent ideas and identities. These very words—"fated to remain 'the same *and* the other'"—have resonated over time, as I have thought about the dense daily lives of "paradoxical communities" whose fabric of belonging had the resilience of woven cloth: I have seen the cloth tear, the threads break, and these dense, decisive lives turn to ethnic, religious and racial warfare. My thoughts this evening, are shaped by something from both conditions, as they emerge from somewhere between these two scenarios.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Kristeva's concept of the "paradoxical community," revised and reinterpreted, makes a salutary contribution to the fraught and fragile "politics of recognition." Hegel casts a long shadow across any discussion of the alienation of consciousness and the estrangement of Spirit, but nowhere has his presence been more keenly felt, in our multicultural and transnational

times, than in discussions devoted to the "recognition" of minorities, the representation of rights, and the intersubjective ethics of dignity and respect. The Hegelian inheritance has been, quite properly, traduced and translated; but our intellectual debt to what Hannah Arendt once described as the "intellectual game with paired antitheses" and "modern reversals" (Arendt, 1998, p. 293) is as tenacious as it is tortuous. Kristeva's "paradoxical community" is a case in point. Grafting the abyssal lack of psychoanalytic desire on to Hegelian Negation, Kristeva doubles and distracts the transcendent progress of the dialectic. In a theoretical move as skilful as the dance of Salome, Kristeva "decapitates the dialectic" (to borrow Sartre's description of Merleau-Ponty's method: Sartre, 1998, p. 614) and introduces an unrelenting "strangeness" into the very lineaments of Ethical Life (*Sittlichkeit*). The "paradoxical community" that ensues is caught in a historical temporality of partial and double identifications that exist side-by-side in Ethical and Political life—at once "same and other"; at once indigenous and foreign; at once citizen and alien; at once *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*. Such alternating and iterative aspects of civil society do not represent equivalent choices of life or structures of community. These "side-by-side" perspectives of a decapitated dialectic are, in the language of the political philosopher Seyla Benhabib, "democratic iterations" that deconstruct the "sovereign nation [and confront its authority with] a process of fluid, open and contentious public debate: the lines separating we and you, us and them, more often than not rest on unexamined prejudices, ancient battles, historical injustices, and sheer administrative fiat" (Benhabib, 2004, p. 178). These democratic iterations intervene in the homogeneous empty time of the nation's existence that Benedict Anderson associates with its resilience and its stability. The recognition of the subject as "same and other" complicates Ethical Life with the recognition of "the rights of others—aliens, residents and citizens," and, as such, is incompatible with the representation of the nation's people as *e pluribus unum.* As Kristeva (1991) puts it:

> Such an ethics should reveal, discuss, and spread a concept of human dignity, wrested from the euphoria of classic humanists and laden with the alienations, dramas, and dead ends of our condition as speaking beings…. That being the case, as social as that strangeness might be, it can be modulated—with the possibility of achieving a polytopic and supple society, neither locked in to the nation or its religion, nor anarchically exposed to all of its explosions. (p. 154)

When theoretically re-tooled for our own times, the "paradoxical community" contributes an essential element to the problem of recognition

as an ethics of neighbourliness and hospitality. In detail this means to conceive of a "polytopic and supple society" that resists the sovereignty of the nation-form without repudiating its regulatory and administrative authority, provides a useful perspective on the "drama of recognition" as it is staged in the social and institutional conditions of alterity—the strangeness, the foreignness—that shape the alienating real of migrant or minority settlement, the habitus of the homeless. Without taking such a critical measure of the valences and the vanities of contemporary globalisation, there is a tendency to make heroes out of the victims of global capital. The elements of the global economy and polity that can be read under the textual signs of "circulation" or "deterritorialisation" are then mobilised for a wider political and ethical argument that suggests that the goal of global citizenship lies, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write, in "the struggle against the slavery of belonging to a nation, an identity, and a people, and thus the desertion from sovereignty and the limits it places on subjectivity—is entirely positive. Nomadism and miscegenation appear here as figures of virtue, as the first ethical practices on the terrain of Empire" (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. 361–2).

Such an emancipatory ideal—so affixed on the *flowing*, borderless, global world—neglects to confront the fact that migrants, refugees, or nomads don't merely circulate. They need to settle, claim asylum or nationality, demand housing and education, assert their economic and cultural rights, and seek the status of citizenship. It is salutary, then, to turn to less "circulatory" forms of the economy like trade and tariffs, or taxes and monetary policy—much less open to postmodern metaphoric appropriation—to see how they impact on the global imaginary of diasporic cultural studies. Positive global relations depend on the protection and enhancement of these national "territorial" resources, which should then become part of the "global" political economy of resource redistribution and a transnational moral economy of redistributive justice.

Second, and even more significant, is a startling shift in the "subject" of Rights and Recognition. Kristeva proposes a politics of recognition not based primarily on our dignity as human beings—the assumption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—but on our psychic alienations, moral ambivalences and personal agonisms as "speaking subjects." The implications of this shift from the figure of the human to the figurations of language—from the individual as the bearer of rights, to human "enunciation" as the ethical agency of recognition—goes far beyond Kristeva's semiotic and psychoanalytic ends. What does it mean to locate the authority of recognition, or the endowment of dignity, in the act of enunciation?

In the scene-shifting, self-positioning regimes of discursive address? Does the immanent, timeworn value of universality have to be renounced in order to accommodate the alternate perspectives of "democratic iterations"—"the side-by-side," "the same and the other"? The act of enunciation, which represents the process and performance of the speaking subject, is the immanent domain of discourse. Enunciation is the ongoing articulation of language that always tries to capture the present as it is passing into the future; and, as such, it is intimately related to the aspirational aspect of the dialectic of recognition. Recognition, in the realm of minorities, is most often a claim to authority for an emergent subject, or a group that seeks to empower its new collective identity. This aspiration is typically associated with a futurity: Never *Again!* In my view, however, the aspiration of rights should be read as a proleptic movement of time and peoples. A "right to difference in equality," Balibar (1994) argues, is "the production of an equality without precedents or models, which would be difference itself, the complementarity and reciprocity of singularities" (p. 56). Echoing something of the same sentiment of the proleptic as the temporality of an aspirational ethics "without precedents" is Claude Lefort's rhetorical question: "Are these various rights not affirmed by virtue of an awareness of right, without objective guarantee?" (Lefort, 1986, p. 261). The symbolic power of rights, Amartya Sen argues in his most recent book, *The Idea of Justice,* lies in their rhetoricity, not in their propositionality—in their acts of enunciation. It is their rhetorical and conceptual structure as ethical assertions—"not propositions about what is already legally guaranteed," Sen argues, that ensures that "the public articulations of human rights [and recognition] are often invitations to initiate some fresh legislation … and not just one more humane interpretation of existing legal protections" (Sen, 2009, p. 359). It is the power of the proleptic to "retrieve" into the "present" what has been excised, excluded or oppressed—the heterogeneity of harm—as if it ensured and protected the "future" of those whose pasts have been traumatised or terrorised. In this heuristic and humanistic act, rights are ideally one step ahead of their legal or instrumental efficacy. This "assertorial" structure of rights can also be gravely misused by failing to back up their declaration with appropriate means of access and protection.

It is the rhetorical and temporal realm "without precedents" (Balibar), "the speaking subject" without objective guarantees (Lefort) and "without guaranteed propositions" (Sen), that ensures the freedoms of Ethical Life. The ethics of Recognition—be they dignity, respect, fairness or, freedom—are quasi-universal, not because they are abstractly true for

all time, nor, like dignity, because they are ends in themselves. Ethical enunciations and rhetorical assertions make a claim to a peculiar "universality-cum-alterity" (if I may be allowed one more invocation of "the same and other") only because we return to them repeatedly, translate them ceaselessly, and extend them proleptically. They are a crucial part of our democratic iterations. At the same time, it is enunciation—the performance and process of discourse "without guarantees"—that makes possible the paradoxical aspirations of neighbourliness and hospitality.

Reflecting on Levinas's statement "Language *is* hospitality," Derrida explores the agonistic nature of hospitality that dwells within the split-subject of language. The law of hospitality is anxiously driven between the ethics of unconditional invitation and the politics of conditional interdiction—visas; entry permits; refugee tribunals; the border-police. The enunciation of language is ambivalently torn between the openness and arbitrariness of signification and the regulatory and representational orders of discourse. This perverse tension—at once ambivalent and anxious—"*must remain so*," Derrida (2000) writes: "We will have to negotiate constantly between these two extensions of the concept of hospitality as well as of language" (p. 135).

What does it mean to "negotiate constantly" between these two intersecting and invasive extensions of language and hospitality? Such a question is no longer restricted to the theoretical speculations of the ivory tower; it increasingly informs the perspective of social reformers and political activists whose view of the world is barred by the steel gates of detention centres and the barbed wire of refugee camps. Interviewed by *Le Monde* in December 1997, Derrida acknowledged the decisive role of the "double law of hospitality" in defining "the unstable site of strategy and decision" (Derrida, 2005, p. 6) for debates on immigration and asylum. This is borne out, for instance, in the discussion around the settlement of HIV positive refugees from sub-Saharan Africa in New Zealand. The deathly double life of this migrant population consists in them being absorbed as newly minted New Zealand citizens who are simultaneously cast-out in the soiled currency of racial slurs, cultural stereotypes, and institutionalised inequity and indignity. Commenting on this cruel and contradictory form of hospitality, Heather Worth of the Australian National Centre in HIV Social research, returns, as she puts it, to "two regimes of a law of hospitality: the unconditional on one hand, and the conditional on the other…. What [Derrida] sees is 'a need to intervene in the condition of hospitality in the name of the unconditional,' even

if this seems impossible because of our inability even to think it or to answer for one's identity or space." (Worth, 2006, p. 232)

The valour and vision of such a call to the "hospitable" rights of refugees is greatly to be admired; Worth is right to warn us that "public pressure in a neo-liberal arena may subsume the special needs refugees have for international protection within an exclusionary policy of mandatory HIV testing." However, the invocation of the double-destiny of hospitality as an ethics of immigration falls short precisely at the point at which it reaches out towards a utopian unconditionality "because of our inability to … think it or to answer for one's identity or space." What such a conclusion reveals—in spite of its laudable right(s) thinking—is the absence of that *ethical and political work of constant negotiation between the conditional and the unconditional, between linguistic signification and discursive, governmental regulation.* Indeed, for us, the question must be how to think—and how to *represent*—the liminality of the conditional within the unconditional; and how to *work with and around* the ambivalence and antagonism that emerges from this interstitial space of "thirdness." The realm of the paradoxical, as I suggested in my reading of Kristeva, belongs neither to the one nor the Other. It is an interstitial realm of the in-between—a space and time of "thirdness."

What is the place of "thirdness" in the constant negotiations of language and hospitality? In his moving text *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas,* Derrida (1999) reminds us that for Levinas "the third is nothing less … than the beginning of justice" (p. 25). And the beginning of the narrative of Justice demands a witness, or as Levinas puts it: "[T]his 'thirdness' turns or makes turn toward it, like a witness (*terstis*) made to bear witness to it…." (Derrida, 1999, p. 29) My insistent focus on the third space as an interstitial moment produced *through* the negotiation of contradiction and ambivalence must now be understood as a site of the witness—the work of witnessing—in the stirrings of a consciousness of justice. Is "Justice" merely a general legal and ethical principle, or does it emerge in Levinas's work carrying the weight of a certain historical and political baggage? It is important to remember—although Derrida is somewhat forgetful of this issue—that some of Levinas's most moving thoughts on "the third" and the question of justice emerge in his text "Peace and Proximity," in which he explores "the bad conscience of Europe" or a "worn-out Europe." Referring to the promise of the Enlightenment, Levinas (1999) writes almost as if he were Frantz Fanon:

> The history of a peace, a freedom and well-being promised on the basis of a light that a universal knowledge projected onto the world and human society … *that* history is not recognisable in its millennia of fratricidal struggles, political or bloody, of imperialism, scorn and exploitation of the human being, the genocides of the Holocaust and terrorism; unemployment and continual desperate poverty of the Third World…." (p. 132)

Working together—and rubbing against each other—the liminalities (*not limits!*) of hospitality and language, reveal the third as a graspable, even if unstable, site of strategy and decision (to borrow Derrida's phrase), be it political or philosophical. This is particularly the case if we follow Levinas's example and attempt to read the "interstices" as a place from which to witness a particular post-colonial history of "inhospitality" *carried out within the pending Euro-Enlightenment promise of universal light and peace.* What will be revealed in the fragment from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which I will now discuss is a "thirdness" or a "third space" that proposes, as a preamble to my entire talk, that the dual-history of language and hospitality work together to reveal a profound truth about the concept of Recognition. Recognition—without which it would be difficult to take responsibility for hospitality in either of its modalities—is a problem of negotiating Alterity, not a matter of accommodating diverse cultures or multiple identities. The "Third" is the place of the witness; it is the time of a "turning" towards the asymmetric neighbour or stranger; it is the uncanny movement by which "the master of the house is at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest—who comes from outside…. He [re]enters his home … [through] the grace of the visitor…." (Derrida, 2000, p. 124)

Consider an incident from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* that narrates the evolving problem of the stranger-as-neighbour in the most "inhospitable" of colonial conditions—the benighted Belgian Congo as it is seen through the fissures and tears of a Europe beginning to show signs of becoming worn out. Marlow, the ethical and narrative protagonist of the novel, knows only too well what it means to live in conditions of moral opacity shrouded in a forest of signs that render the conditions of hospitality barely intelligible for both coloniser and colonised: "We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse" (p. 35). In the midst of this bedlam he sees a French naval vessel, a man-of-war, shelling the bush, "firing into a continent" in pursuit of a "camp of natives—[they] called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere" (p. 14). Conrad's

theatre of asymmetric warfare is accompanied by a narrative insistence that the knowledge of identity and difference is as much a question of epistemology and history as it is a perceptual and phenomenological problem that relates to *how we see* and *from where we look*—or, in relation to the stranger—*at whom we are looking.* Are natives taken to be enemies because they are hidden, "out of sight somewhere"? Is this an existential anxiety in the face of what seems alien or foreign? Or does such an affect of alienation mask the annihilatory strategy of the Imperialist? Is it self-protection or self-projection? Where should the ethical line be drawn in these extreme conditions, which are also the conditions for Levinas's concept of the third as witness?

To draw a line that distinguishes friend from enemy, Marlow approaches the "other," shrinks the distance, and enters into a form of ethical proximity. Nobody is "at home" in the colonial site, as Albert Memmi once suggested. When the "natives" are observed "within six inches," Marlow is convinced of the injustice of naming them enemies or criminals: "these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals and the outraged law like the bursting shells had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea" (p. 16). As Conrad's narrative destroys the naming frameworks of war ("enemy") and legality ("criminal"), it moves us closer towards identifying with the native's historic situation and his human condition, rather than accepting those projected "identities" and self-serving vocabularies that are shaped for the purposes of war and the laws of conquest:

> … half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair…. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now,—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation … Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand … and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant…. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket…. *He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck—Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge—an ornament—a charm—a propitiatory act?* Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas. (p. 17, my emphasis)

Not enemy. Not criminal. Not even native. Having glimpsed the Levinasian face of the other, Marlow can now focus closely on the tiny bit of white worsted whose social origins and cultural significance are ambiguous and enigmatic—open to question. They are part of the exploitative, oppressive colonial trade, but as bodily decoration—as art or craft—

what value do we assign to it beyond the economics of Empire? As the arbitrary sign shifts across the open frame of signification, it marks the distance—and the cultural difference—that lies in-between the relative familiarity of a badge and the relative unknowability of a Congolese propitiatory act. Somewhere between the two, Marlow enters a third space. He is now engaged in a translational temporality in which the "sign" of the white worsted from beyond the seas, is an object of intention that has lost its mode of intention in the colonial space, or vice versa. The living flux of narrative meaning that marks the "difference" between intention as object and as modality shifts the balance of discourse from the language of enmity to the language of proximity: "I saw a face near my hand … and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant." But that is not all.

If Marlow's gaze had stopped there, it could have been read as merely an act of pity and philanthropy. But beyond the duality of the silent face-to-face encounter, lies the white worsted, a mediating, material element from the object-world that talks back to Marlow as he probes its origin and function. It is the thread as a mediating third space that designates the dialogical relation between the narrator and the native as contending and contradictory positions within a conflictual discourse. The white thread is a text of signs and symbols that reintroduces, to the reader and the narrator, the silent, dying native as an agent caught in the living flux of language and action: "He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck—Why? Where did he get it?" This goes beyond any notion of respect for the other's identity or humanity as a universal subject that has an *a priori* right to representation. It is an identification, in third space, with the thought and action of the other as having an opacity of its own that cannot be simply "read off" the face of things; the thread signifies a "thickness" of culture that is as enigmatic as the obliquity of the signifier through which it is enunciated.

Even in his prone state, the "moribund shapes … [as] free as air—and nearly as thin"—the dying native induces an infectious introjection that comes from outside, from an intuition of the intended act of the other—*Why? Where did he get it?"*—in order to drive Marlow, as if from the inside, to make up his own mind against the received imperial logic of his wretched times. In reaching out to the specific thought of the other and grappling with what is not entirely intelligible within it—rather than acknowledging an "identity"—there lies the possibility of identifying also with the unconscious of the other, and extending oneself in the direction of the neighbour's alterity and unknowability as the basis

of the *acte gratuit* of Hospitality: *"Where did he get it? Was it a badge—an ornament—a charm—a propitiatory act?"* The third space is a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal in the historic experience, and the cultural representation, of other peoples, times, languages, texts. What implications does this have for the role of alterity in the social and psychic field of Recognition?

Charles Taylor's *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* has become the *locus classicus* for most discussions of the "struggle for recognition" in our times. But not for our times only. Works that achieve a classic status are reputed to be possessed of rare prefigurative powers that transcend their own times; it is often the case, however, that a classic survives the test of time because it lacks hermeneutic hubris, and inspires acts of transgression and translation that question its discursive authority while extending its life. The argumentative *after-life* of Taylor's essay is indebted to his use of the Herderian concept of "authenticity" to reprise Hegel's dialectic of recognition. Staging the struggle for "recognition" in the context of the particular *style* of claim-making and identity-staking associated with the rise of multiculturalism subtly alters the terms of engagement: where the duelling consciousnesses of master and slave were once the players, now the "dialogical voice" and the "politics of difference" become the new contenders for recognition. The distinctive voice of the "inner life" acquires an articulacy—and an authenticity—through what Taylor (1992) describes, as "the things our significant others want to see in us" (p. 33).

My own intervention in the discussion on "authenticity" and "recognition" derives from some of Hannah Arendt's leading themes in *The Human Condition:* In what sense is recognition a practice of acknowledgement and empowerment related to the "agent disclosing capacity" of speech and action? How do you "recognise" the emergence of agency in the midst of that "curious quality of *alteritas*" or Otherness (Arendt, 1998, p. 176) that reveals an agent who is neither the author or the producer of his own life-story, to adapt one of Arendt's most memorable phrases. Is there more to be said about "otherness"— about the role of *Alterity* in the realm of recognition—than Taylor's benign statement that "[w]e define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others [G. H. Mead] want to see in us?"

The sovereignty of identity—whether it is projected upon us by "significant others" or expressed *in propria persona*—is not the crux of recognition. The *subject* of recognition is the process by which "agency" emerg-

es through the mediating structures of alterity that constitute social representation. Look again at Taylor's account of what he calls the "fundamentally dialogical character" of human life, and you will find that the practice of recognition begins, so to speak "in the middle." It is only after signifying structures of intersubjective dialogue are established at the level of institutional and ideological anonymity that interlocutory agents—you and I, significant and insignificant "others"—*belatedly* assume identities in a contingent, open-ended conversation of plural and proximate relations. This signifying "third" space, that lies in the interstices of agency and identity, is what Arendt (1998) defines as the *intangible, in-between*—as "something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (p. 182). Such a *de-personalised* realm of representation and mediation—where "subject positions" *precede* expressive subjectivities, and sites of enunciation *precede* individual speech-acts—is crucial to the identification of an agent who is *both belated (non-sovereign) and intricately related to, what Arendt calls, the web of human togetherness.*

The "in-between"—*inter-est*—is an intangible time-space because it is open to contingency and unpredictability as to "who" the agent may be; what subject-position he or she may take up; and how and when a speech-act might emerge to make a claim to recognition in a mode that may be individual or collective. But the "contingent" is not merely a formal or functional condition of agency; it is an ethical disposition that is intimately linked to the belatedness of the subject. It seems strange to think of recognition as a temporal regime when it has, in the main, been conceived of in spatial and positional terms, whether these are dialectical or dialogical. Agamben, however, is surely right to argue, in *Remnants of Auschwitz,* that the "faith" of the subject as *agent* of Testimony lies deep within the site of enunciation—in the contingent potentiality to speak and to be—rather than at the propositional level of the speech-act (the archive). "Contingency is possibility [or potentiality] put to the test of the subject … [because] [t]estimony is a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech …. [This division and separation in the subject signifies] the living being and the speaking being, the *Muselmann* and the witness" (Agamben, 1999, p. 146).

Speech and action in the realm of alterity might sound irredeemably abstract but it is a crucial site of ethical and equitable recognition because it aspires to *"the right to equality in difference."* Indeed, it is to this very virtual and volatile medium of "alterity" that Patchen Markell draws our attention in perhaps the most important insight of his recent book

Bound by Recognition. There is "a more fundamental kind of justice," he writes,

> which does not yet take place directly between two (or among several) determinate people. It *cannot*, because it involves precisely the acts and practices through which we open ourselves to, or avoid, the presence of others …. [A]ccepting … the existence of others—as yet unspecified, indeterminate others—makes unpredictability and lack of mastery into unavoidable conditions of human agency. Such acknowledgment is a crucial part of justice, yet it is not something we owe or give directly to others. (Markell, 2003, pp. 179–80)

It is in, and through, this open field of alterity that the struggle for recognition begins: it is here that alignments and antagonisms of "recognition" come to be represented in a form of "[e]quality … [that] is not the neutralisation of differences (equalisation), but the condition and requirement of the diversification of freedoms" (Balibar, 1994, p. 56)—the *contradictory* place of universality in the face of the particular; the *turn* of subjectivity to the action of agency; the *conflict* between the ethic of equal dignity and the politics of difference.

Recognition is something more than a person-to-person dialogical exchange, or a group-to-group inter-personal acknowledgment. My attraction to Arendt's intersubjective account of agency for these purposes lies in her emphasis on the relational, rather than identitarian, concept of agency. Recognition discloses the contingent and conflictual relationship between the "what" and the "who" of agency: *what* a person is in the context of shared social and historical norms; and *who* he is in a more private, particularistic sense. It is the shifting ratios of "what" and "who"—determined by social differences, psychic dispositions, moral and political discriminations—that makes the agent's disclosure deeply problematic. It is, however, the very frustration and perplexity that accompanies the revelation of agency *as enunciation*—"neither reveal[ed] nor hid[den] in words, but give[n] [in] manifest signs" (Arendt, 1998, p. 182; Arendt is here quoting Heraclitus, Fragment 93)—that is, at once, the trial of, and testimony to, the agent's freedom as acknowledged in the ambivalent and ambulant movement between the "who" and the "what" in the process of judgment , deliberation, choice and action.

Arendt's account of the state of alterity picks up something of this ambivalent, double sided recognition of agency: "I am not only for others but for myself, and in this latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness" (Arendt, 1981, p. 183). These "inserted differences," I have argued, are temporalities that move restlessly between

the agent's "what and who"; switch back and forth between the first person and the third person, in-between We and They; and construct a contingent community of mutual recognition by intangibly connecting belatedness and relatedness. It is by grasping this ambivalence that articulates "the person" with "the agent" that we follow Arendt into the realm of a politics of rights and mutual recognition that empowers us in speech and action, to be, at once, *for* others and *for* ourselves. Recognition, then, is the capacity to represent and regulate the ambivalence that arises when what is presented as fatedly "objective", material, conditional—injustice, discrimination, poverty–-is capable of producing, in the interstices, an agency of empowerment, resistance, transformation.

It is this very intervention of the agent in the interstices of "recognition" that constitutes, for Charles Taylor, the problem of the politics of difference. Taylor's argument, from which both Amartya Sen and Anthony Appiah take their cue, is part of a narrative that goes like this: The politics of difference enters the well-established world of equal dignity in camouflage carrying an identical basket of rights and immunities. But once inside that realm of "universal equality," the *belated* agent of "difference" unmasks herself, produces a gun from the shopping basket, and holds universality and equality to ransom. In this hermeneutic "hold up" we are asked to do two seemingly contradictory things: to acknowledge the demand for universality, and to uphold the claim to "an equality-in-difference." Taylor (1992) addresses the problem by reverting to the Hegelian habit of "sublation" and suggesting that "[t]he politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity through one of those shifts … [that] imparts a radically new meaning to an old principle" (p. 39). But is this just a shift in the drama of recognition or is it a scene-change? Can claims to "universality" and "difference," "equality" and "singularity," co-exist in the struggle for recognition? And is it possible for the belated subject, shuffling ambivalently between two "goods"—that are synchronic but asymmetric—, to achieve a measure of agency, derive some sense of self-fulfilment, and acquire a register of recognition?

It is possible to pursue these questions once we resist the organic link between "universality" and "difference", and insist that the "sublatory shift" may be, in fact, a more dramatic interruption. I have deliberately used theatrical metaphors to suggest that the conflictual connection between "equal dignity" and "the politics of difference" is better explained by Brecht's theatre of alienation than by Hegel's theory of negation. *Can a demand for universality, at the same time, power a claim to specificity?*

How would you draw a line between them? How would "equal dignity" be aligned to a right to "equality in difference"? I would suggest, in the company of Brecht, that the "politics of difference" belatedly *"interrupts"* and relocates the normative priority of the demand for equality and universality. Interruption is the dramatic method Brecht uses to dispel the audience's enchantment with theatrical naturalism and ideological normalisation. To interrupt the seriality and synchrony of the spectacle—or metaphorically, the flow of thought—is to make the audience aware of the contradictory, conflictual conditions of production as well as the theatrical—or conceptual—apparatus that gives authority to an idea, an image, a scene. Commenting on Brecht's method, Walter Benjamin (2003) writes: "Interruption … [in Brecht's theatre treats] reality as though it were setting up an experiment with the 'conditions' [upon which the play was built, placed] at the end of the experiment, not at the beginning" (p. 4).

   "Interruption" does not merely provide a retrospective assessment of the performance of "equal dignity" and its success or failure in the distribution of goods and the recognition of groups. Interruption, as an act of supplementation, is a more intrusive and interrogative agency of iteration and displacement. Counterfactual choice is crucial to the process of constructing a legitimate *claim* to "equality in difference" in the political present *as if* that had been an option at the very beginning, in the distant past. It is this *temporal repositioning*—telescoping the conditions of the past *into* the ethical and political "ends" of present-day politics—that resonates with Arendt's ethics of alterity: *"I am not only for others but for myself, and in this latter case, I clearly am not just one. A difference is inserted into my Oneness."* Equal dignity is not simply erased or replaced by the biopolitics of difference; nor are we simply offered a choice between the two. Interruption indicates a new dialectic at work in which "difference" is now "on the inside" (as Taylor suggested) driving the agenda, while equal dignity or universality is in an external position, providing traction at the rim of the wheel. In both using and subverting a more conventional sense of equality-as-universality for the purposes of an "equality-in-difference," I am in agreement with Balibar's proposed double and disjunctive articulation of Equality and Difference for the purposes of the recognition of minoritarian agency. "[T]here is a kind of difference that cannot be overcome by the institution of equality," he writes. "[But this] does not mean that equality is not here too the formal condition of liberation, but that it remains *purely external* …. [For cultural "differences" of race, gender, generation, geopolitical location] are repressed contradictions that haunt modern politics: in this sense, even though

they are constantly presented as exterior to it, they are constantly present in the *hollow* of its discursive, legislative, organizational, and repressive practices" (Balibar, 1994, p. 55; my emphasis). "Recognition" *now* is as much a phenomenological condition as it is a political struggle; and ambivalence and anxiety are as significant for achieving "equality," as counterfactual claims and "repressed contradictions" are for delivering the diversification of freedoms.

The work of the diasporic Palestinian artist Emily Jacir is exemplary for such a discussion on Recognition, working as she does with the techniques of split-screens and double-images—creating an art of the interstices—as she moves in-between a montage of representations of everyday life amongst Palestinians in Ramallah and New York. Her intense focus on specific details that identify "localities" and communities—national or diasporic—engaged in various forms of shared labour (or leisure) is a subtle engagement with the problem of scale in the context of the connectivity and circuitry of global conditions and communications. The global "subjects" or topoi of Hostility and Hospitality—economic or political migration, diaspora, refugees, Palestinian quasi-nationhood, U.S. Hegemony—are not presented as over-arching, framing narratives cast in recognisable, iconic representations. We are not primed to "look down" from the global to the local, or vice versa. In the sequence of Jacir's work, the spectator occupies the absent, ambivalent space of global connection. The spectator is located in the interstices–in the gap between signifying images and significant image-worlds—moving between Ramallah and New York; trying to recognise which "scenario" belongs to which geopolitical setting and how to intervene in both, or interpret their intersective frames. Jacir's art returns us to the tension generated by the double-nature of hospitality, and on which its argument has been based. Jacir constantly negotiates between what Derrida (2000) so rightly identified as "these two extensions of the concept of hospitality as well as of language" (p. 135).

Jacir's work, she insists, is about "going back and forth":

> It is about the relationship of myself and my experience and my body to my surroundings. Whether it's here or in New York or in Ramallah. It is about passing through places … about me wandering through space and time, and about borders and crossings, and exchanges. (Jacir, 2004, pp. 3–4)

The two-video installation *Ramallah/New York* juxtaposes scenes of everyday Palestinian life shot in similar locations in Ramallah and New York; so careful is Jacir to place her figures in the same position in the

Fig.1: Emily Jacir, *Ramallah/New York* 2004–2005; two channel video installa-
tion; dimensions variable; Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York.

frame, and to take the shot from virtually the same angle, that it is diffi-
cult to tell apart the different locations of the various mise-en-scènes.
New York or not? Ramallah or not? It is almost impossible to answer
these questions, and that is precisely the point. Jacir's montage of fungible
locations and fragile bodies takes a more oblique view of the politics of
everyday life: her purpose in making it almost impossible to *visually* de-
cipher the difference between the locations—Ramallah, New York—is to
induce an anxious undecidability in the frame of representation and the
act of viewing. It is as if the "hostility" of an unhomed Palestine and
the estranged hospitality of migrant New York are placed side-by-side,
and subtly and suddenly cast their shadows across each other. In trying
to identify these geopolitical locations against the odds, the ruse of the
title is to acknowledge the specificity of site while eliding visual recogni-
tion. The viewer is split—or doubled?—in vacillating between frames:

Which is which? Where is *here?* If read from the perspective of the dis-placement of the angle of vision, the work sets out to relate the two sce-narios to each other—and to the viewer, who stands in a space of third-ness, uncertainly in between the screens—through a diasporic narrative of "going back and forth …. It is about passing through places … about borders and crossings, and exchanges."

Jacir's focus on locality in Ramallah and New York does not neglect more global issues; there is a foreboding that at any moment on any day—no more than a minute after the videocam has recorded a person's life and its singular sediments—there could be a catastrophe that would forever maim the routine of civil society and the culture of community. In one of these places—we don't know which—there lurks the epochal memory of 9/11; in the other, there is the everyday fear of disorder, vio-lence, and violation. Our inability to distinguish between locations com-mits us to going back and forth, across both historical and political ter-rains, constituting that third space, the interstitial space of the witness. However, through this diasporic movement we commit ourselves to the double duty of hospitality: to affiliate with the global ethic of choosing to become involved with the historic fate of *both* societies. Jacir's art fo-cuses on the problems of resettlement—in the context of refugee accom-modation—where the epochal and emancipatory issue of "rights" is placed in the everyday context of what it means to rebuild a life—to sur-vive.

Levinas (1987) warns us, "consciousness is always late for the rendezvous with the neighbor" (p. 119). Taking account of alterity in thought is very different from grasping it in action, in memory, in art. The *nature* of being different, in the midst of plurality, is an ontological problem, while the *performance* of alterity, in the "notorious uncertainty not only of all po-litical matters, but of all affairs that go on between men directly," (Arendt, 1998, p. 182) is a political and ethical issue related to the disclo-sure of agency. Both approaches to alterity bear a perplexed and precari-ous relation to the present: how can the agent be revealed in the "flux of action and speech"? How does the singularity of the actor, the "who" of personal experience and unique expression—as distinct from the "what" of public projection and attribution—disclose itself in the equivocality of language, and the contingency of action? It is the insertion of social plu-rality—differential interests and values that vary within and between groups—into the subject's ambivalent identification with the web of human togetherness, that makes the coexistence of communities at

once necessary and contingent. Alterity incites a movement, *to and fro*, that turns the interiority of the self outwards to face the world, while transforming external reality into an intimate relation, within oneself and with others. Such a double-edged movement becomes the basis of the agent's consciousness of "being together" in the very act of recognition—of *seeing oneself as another.* And it is in that anxious moment of "turning", *to and fro*, within the web of human relationships, that the subject reveals its agency and discloses a *regard* for the neighbour as, at once, strange and close—"an anachronous presence to consciousness" (Levinas, 1987, p. 119). Recognition always goes two ways at once, just as hospitality has to endure its double destiny.

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