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Hydric Life: A Nietzschean Reading of Postcolonial Communication

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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She is searching for a language with which to relay her urgency.

-- Lee Sharkey

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses the question of marginalization in cross-cultural communication from the perspectives of hermeneutic philosophy and postcolonial theory. Specifically, it focuses on European colonialism's effect on language and communicative practices in Latin America. I argue colonialism creates a deeply sedimented but unacknowledged background of inherited cultural prejudices against which social and political problems of oppression, violence and marginalization, especially towards women, emerge—*but whose roots in colonial and imperial frameworks have lost transparency*. This makes it especially difficult for postcolonial subjects to meaningfully express their own experiences of psychic dislocation and fragmentation because the discursive background used to communicate these experiences is made up of multiple, sometimes conflicting traditions. To address this problem, I turn to a strategic use of Nietzsche's conceptions of subjectivity and language as metaphor to engage the unique difficulties that arise in giving voice to the subaltern experience. Thus, I argue that while colonialism introduces an added layer of complexity to philosophical discussions of language, the concrete particularities and political emergencies of Latin American history necessitate an account of language that can speak to these concrete particularities. To this

end, I develop a conception of, what I call, "hydric life," a *postcolonial* feminist

hermeneutics that better accommodates these cultural specificities.

INTRODUCTION

In the postcolonial world, the inability to speak and be heard across group and
social differences can come at a ruinous cost, especially for women and indigenous
peoples who, historically, have been disproportionately affected by social and political
violence due to intersectional oppressions like race, class, sex, gender, migratory or legal
status and ethnicity. In situations where, in order to relay social urgencies or negotiate
material interests (either on their own behalf, that of their family, or marginalized
communities), postcolonial subjects are compelled to initiate dialogue with members of
dominantly-positioned cultures (as in Anglo/European) in order to survive, what may be
lost in the course of intercultural dialogue is far more than a mere failure to reach
agreement or mutual understanding. For marginalized subjects, whole families may be
forcibly, irrevocably separated, confiscated indigenous lands razed rather than returned,
mothers of 'disappeared' children left without a body to bury, public life pervaded by
impunity, graft, coercion and continued violence against minority groups. It may result,
for example, in an apology from President Bill Clinton for U.S. support of a former Latin
American dictatorship 30 years earlier, when indigenous groups attempted to
communicate Guatemalan president Carlos Arana Osorio's threats to their communities,
which stated, in his words, that "if it is necessary to turn the country into a cemetery in
order to pacify it, I will not hesitate to do so" (1971). For the quarter of a million Mayan
Indians that died as a result of this campaign of violence, this was a 'ruinous cost'.

And yet these social and political issues surrounding intercultural dialogue have not been lost on social theorists. In the mid twentieth-century, following the practical and moral failures to, as Paul Ricoeur put it, "listen to the plea from the other side" in holocaust Europe (2004, 389), particular focus fell on how to go about securing the conditions underlying basic processes of communication deemed necessary for equitable dialogue, as well as on the need to theorize discursive processes "immune to repression and inequality" (Habermas 2001, 88). "Discourse ethics," (or "communicative ethics") as it came to be known, was founded on this "dialectical *double apriori*" to both posit an ideal form of discourse immune from coercion while also pursuing independent legal, institutional, and 'system-related' reforms in culture that would create the necessary "*conditions of application* for the basic procedural norms" of such an ethic, and which, as post-holocaust Europe all-too-well discovered, "are not, or not yet, given in the world in which we live" (Apel 2001, 90; 2000).

For Latin American philosophers like Enrique Dussel, this multi-tiered approach to discourse ethics fails to do justice to the concrete historical realities facing seventy-five percent of the world's population currently living in the third or fourth world, or in what is sometimes referred to as the "global South" (1994, 80).[1]

For these populations, the cost of first securing the social and political 'conditions of application' necessary for the procedural safeguards of communicative ethics to take effect in North-South dialogue—and which rely on a mutual extension of respect and "good will" on the part of all speakers— simply comes at too high a price. The problem today is that, despite a teeming abundance of 'good will' on the part of marginalized and subaltern subjects to communicate, their communicative efforts

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continue to be neglected due to social, structural, and historical oppressions. But while philosophers like Dussel have attempted to remedy this situation by grounding discourse ethics on religious-ethical (in his case, Levinasian) imperatives, my approach is different. It centers on, what I see as, the pressing need to more robustly theorize the historical impact of colonialism on postcolonial and subaltern communicative practices. One clue to this need arises when we consider the central principle of discourse ethics to "transcend all local convention" based on a transcendental-pragmatic model of communication that emphasizes "the intuitive preunderstanding that every subject competent in speech and action brings to a process of argumentation" (Habermas 2001, 90, 105). My aim is to show that, in the postcolonial world, what it means to have an "intuitive preunderstanding" of *any* social practice is at issue due to the violent impact of European colonization.

For these reasons, in this dissertation I try to understand and give an account, from a philosophical perspective, of the historical conditions which have impacted and continue to impact the lives of those dispossessed by European colonialism, particularly with regard to women in Latin America, the Caribbean, and along the U.S.-Mexico border. *One* way of doing this is by analyzing the effects of colonialism on native Mesoamerican conceptual frameworks, effects which, by virtue of the *forceful* imposition of foreign categories of knowledge onto Amerindian landscapes, have had a profound impact on the speaking positions of modern Latin Americans, especially through the active colonization of native languages. This violent imposition of European norms and practices ensured that, in the postcolonial world, light did not 'dawn gradually over the whole', to reverse Wittgenstein's metaphor. That is to say, for Wittgenstein, "when we

first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions," (2006, 235) which, in the case of Amerindian culture, was shattered and supplanted by a radically different contextual system, enforced, in turn, by new linguistic conventions such as subject-predicate grammar and modern alphabetic literacy.

And yet, while this historical impact has been profound, it is rarely acknowledged as a powerful force in our day-to-day public dealings and interactions. This is especially true at the level of dialogue and discussion-based politics in Latin America, where the existence of democratic public processes and institutions (in certain regions) make it appear as if structural checks are in place that would allow claimants, regardless of ethnic, racial, or sexual differences, to address grievances with confidence that they will indeed be heard. Feminist communication theory has been particularly helpful in this regard for outlining the ways in which democratic dialogue and deliberative models of decision-making can work to exclude certain groups by relying on particular conceptions of language as neutral and value-free (Young 1999, 2000; Rakow 2004). Because, by and large, these theories also do no account for the differences enacted by colonial imposition of one culturally proscribed, discursive framework over another, one way to understand my project is as an extension of postcolonial perspectives to feminist communication theory. Thus**,** it might be surprising that I do not directly engage deliberate democratic models or feminist critiques thereof in this work.[2] This is not on account of an oversight, but because I have chosen an altogether different strategy for addressing questions of marginalization in cross-cultural communication.

Methodologically, I draw on a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives including postcolonial theory, Continental and postcolonial feminisms, and hermeneutic philosophy. Hermeneutic philosophy serves as a foreground for much of this project because it offers the historical and contextual view of language and meaning-formation that is crucial for my analysis of the cultural impact of colonization on Amerindian languages. To rely on the hermeneutic view of language, then, is to take as a starting point the centrality of language in shaping human understanding. To this end, it is important to acknowledge the mainstream Anglophone view of language that I am critical of in this project. Specifically, it is the conception of language that was inspired by Cartesian and empiricist epistemologies and popularized by the legacies of analytic philosophers like A. J. Ayer, Bertrand Russell, (even J. L. Austin) and the linguist Noam Chomsky, who regard language largely as a rule-governed system that is capable of securing an accurate relationship of correspondence between the contents of the speaker's mind ('inner') and the external referent ('outer') to which he or she refers. Philosophy of language, on this view, becomes the formalized study of the various dimensions of the mind as well as the logical analysis of propositions and semantic content. By way of hermeneutic criticisms, I argue that this ahistorical conception of language fails to acknowledge the thick background of historical and cultural meanings that are already familiar, already shaping and guiding our speech acts, determining in advance why one values certain epistemological, socio-political, and ethical paradigms and concepts in the first place. This is particularly important for the purposes of my project because these de-contextualized, subject-object views of language were fundamental in the colonization of native Amerindian languages, and can be evinced from conquest-era ethnographic

records and administrative manuals, such as Fray Diego de Valadez's monumental *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579).

Given this methodological overview of my project, I begin chapter one with an analysis of the hermeneutic view of language developed by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor because these thinkers recognize that prior to the reflective, inner/outer distinctions of mainstream representational views of language, human beings are *already* tacitly involved in a socio-historical tradition, a shared historical background that gives value and meaning to everyday acts and practices, and that we embody these cultural meanings pre-reflectively. One of the problems traditionally associated with this view, however, is that if one is always inextricably 'situated' in a particular historical understanding, the question arises as to how social actors marginalized within that particular tradition can ever adopt an objective, independent standpoint from which to genuinely challenge the oppressive, perhaps racist, or sexist tendencies that are endemic to that tradition. To address this problem, I offer an overview of Jürgen Habermas's critique of Gadamer, outlining the various ways in which, from Habermas's perspective, the limitations of the hermeneutic situation might be overcome for social and political theorists. Following my own commitments to a plural feminist politics that can attend to the concrete urgencies and specificities of social life without abandoning the irreducible imprint of history in shaping those urgencies, I then turn to the applied, hermeneutic feminism of Georgia Warnke, who draws on points of contact between Habermas and Gadamer. Warnke offers a broader and more pluralistic interpretative position that is attentive to the diverse, heterogeneous experiences of

marginalized social groups and actors in culture, specifically with regard to women. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that, although Warnke succeeds in broadening the hermeneutic horizon to more accurately account for the experiences of women, Warnke is, as a hermeneuticist, unable to address the uniquely embodied concerns of the *postcolonial* gendered subject whose meaningful historical background has been forcibly shattered by colonialism.

In chapter two, using a feminist approach, I turn to the question of producing theoretical frameworks that do justice to the complexity of lived experience for postcolonial and subaltern subjects. In this regard, I show how the rupture of the background of meaning for the postcolonial subject adds a layer of intricacy that neither traditional hermeneutic philosophy nor Warnke's own hermeneutic feminism can account for. This is due to the unique effect colonialism has had on native Amerindian languages, including the very interpretive possibilities made available in culture. To this end, by drawing on postcolonial theory, I show how the introduction of the Western alphabet and subject-predicate grammar as well as the assumptions of exclusionary logic (i.e. the laws of identity and non-contradiction), interiorization, and narrative linearity have *resulted in a unique kind of violence to the discursive practices of native Mesoamerican communities*. The consequences for the modern, marginalized postcolonial subject are, in my view, twofold. First, the trauma and confusion caused by inhabiting a horizon of disjointed and fragmented meanings has resulted in a complex, multiplicitous experience of selfhood that, as Gloria Anzuldúa describes, is always caught 'in-between' worlds and produces a state of "psychic restlessness" that makes negotiating between these multiple

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meanings and cultural norms a complicated affair (1987, 78). Second, the breakdown of a prior cultural context means that this postcolonial, multiplicitous subject must bear the added burden of negotiating interests through conceptual paradigms and norms one is not totally at home with. I go on to argue that because the hermeneutic view of language is largely focused on the conditions for worldly meaning that is, for the most part, cohesive, stable and unified, it tends to overlook particular experiences of psychic confusion and dislocation when an indigenous horizon of meaning has been shattered or destroyed by means of colonialism.

Chapter three addresses this phenomenon of ruptured meaning by turning to the philosophies of language in Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva. Again, I argue that while the hermeneutic view of language emphasizes the stability and continuity of meaning—thereby addressing the problem of cultural differences by means of some shared agreement or, what Gadamer calls, a "fusion" of interpretative horizons—what is often neglected is how this smooth continuity of meaning is frequently shattered in the postcolonial subject's everyday life. On this account, Kristeva offers a theory of language where meaning is continually ruptured by what Kristeva calls "the semiotic," that is, by pre-predicative bodily drives and desires that reveal a self that is never unified and cohesive but fundamentally "in process/on trial [*en procès*]" and multiplicitous. By outlining Kristeva's central distinction between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic', illustrating her often overlooked intellectual indebtedness to Bakhtin, and exploring her psychoanalytic connection to Freud and Lacan, I try to show how the hermeneutic notion of dialogic understanding between different cultural frameworks can be problematized if

the Other's self-understanding is already polyphonic and unstable. I show how, on Kristeva's account, the semiotic invests language with the full complexity and dynamism of the material body, revealing a realm of incarnate meaning that cannot be captured in the symbolic realm, in language or in signification. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that, while helpful for postcolonial theory in decalcifying the notion of a unified subject and introducing alterity to notions of selfhood (as in 'the stranger within'), Kristeva is still too indebted to European intellectual culture, specifically the theoretical assumptions of psychoanalysis and Western notions of subject-predicate grammar that she inherits from her encounters with French structuralism. Thus, she is largely unable to see how the phenomena of literacy, Eurocentric interpretations of psychic development, and even the alphabet might be experienced as sources of historical oppression.

In chapter four, I attempt to overcome the theoretical prejudices associated with Kristeva's developmental model while retaining her attentiveness to issues of marginality, multiplicitous subjectivity, and embodied alterity by turning to Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy of language. By engaging the influence of Nietzsche on Latin American philosophy in general (and how his views on language can resonate with the works of important Latina writers such as Mariana Ortega and Gloria Anzaldúa), I suggest that, when brought into theoretical interaction with postcolonial theory, certain aspects of Nietzsche's thought are uniquely suited to address the lived-experience of the postcolonial subject. I begin by distinguishing between three accounts of language that Nietzsche gave throughout his career. The first account is a critique of the representational (inner/outer) view of language that the philosophical tradition inherited

from the metaphysics of Plato and Descartes. The second account is a hermeneutic view, where language is understood as a background of socio-historical meanings that the speaking subject is always inextricably bound to. The third, and most important view for my purposes is the account of language as an embodied and pre-conscious metaphorical activity. I want to suggest that this last account—which integrates the hermeneutic view without neglecting the importance of the pre-linguistic, corporeal body—is crucial in providing a theoretical framework that recognizes the fractured, contradictory, and multiplicitous aspects of postcolonial life while at the same time holding these divergent and ambiguous aspects together in a meaningful way so that the notion of selfhood can still be applied. By stressing the interdependence between the contradictory and complex drives and affects of the physical body on the one hand, and the socio-historical background that gives meaning to these drives and affects on the other, Nietzsche opens a discursive space for a self that is both multiplicitous and unified, fragmented and held together. Language is metaphorical activity in this regard because it always begins with the dark and unintelligible drives of one's own material body, and these drives are, like those of the postcolonial subject, translated and made intelligible by a horizon of meaning that is not one's own.

Thus, taking a cue from Nietzsche (but also moving beyond his project), the notion of selfhood as continually splintered by experiences of narrative discontinuity (due to inhabiting multiple and conflicting contexts of cultural reference) yet held together by a hermeneutic background that allows one to strategically participate in meaning-formation, even in the language of one's own oppressors, is what I call "Hydric life". Thinking of postcolonial life for historically marginalized subjects as "hydric", on my

view, allows for a positive re-description of an otherwise alienating and confusing phenomenon that can further marginalize social groups and actors already at the limen of discursive spaces.[3] It can also concretize and give legitimacy to contradictory experiences that, in the absence of a generally cohesive, social backdrop (or what Charles Taylor calls a "home understanding") with which to articulate and voice such experiences, are deemed invalid or not acknowledged as real.[4]

A word now on terminology. As the reader will find, I often make use of the term 'postcolonial subject' to denote social groups and actors marginalized on the basis of multiple oppressions like race, class, caste, gender and ethnicity in the colonized world.[5] Although my use of the term applies to the Latin American context, it is analogous to Ranajit Guha's term "subaltern" as a "a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in another way" (1988, 35). I recognize, of course, that different configurations of intersectional oppressions can result in significantly different levels of marginalization on the part of individuals (an indigenous K'iche' Mayan woman, for example, is very different from a Latina academic living in the United States, yet they are both 'postcolonials' in the sense I describe), and that social groups are marked by internal differences as well. One important difference is that for Guha and other Indian historiographers like Spivak, the term subaltern (originally borrowed from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* from 1929-35) specifically addresses the question of agency in relation to contemporary norms and culture. That is to say, subaltern peoples are those who have been historically excluded from access to representation in the dominant cultural

paradigm, as well as from the very instruments of writing history (such as literacy and writing). It is on account of this exclusion that subaltern subjects are 'muted' or cannot speak in terms legitimated by the dominant culture. By contrast, a Latina academic, whether in Latin America or abroad, cannot be said to be subaltern because she has access to what Michel de Certeau calls the "instruments of history" (1988, 70). For this reason, I sometimes qualify the term "postcolonial subject" with "subaltern" to mark the difference in subjects I refer to. Although I specifically attend to the experiences of non-indigenous postcolonial subjects, such as U.S. third-world feminists living in the United States, generally speaking, my main focus remains on those most affected, historically, by colonial imposition, such as indigenous Amerindian women.

Next, because I sometimes use the term 'language' interchangeably for *spoken* language when addressing issues of communication, there at times remains some ambiguity as to the view on language I rely on for my arguments against the Imperial project in the Americas. In this sense, a practical differentiation of terms using capitals (as in "Language" to denote the *hermeneutic* view of language, and "language" to refer to speech or verbal utterances) might have been helpful but would have introduced its own difficulties into the mix. Thus, for the record, I understand speech communication to be just *one facet*, one 'realization'—albeit a very important one— of language in the wider, hermeneutic sense of an expressive background that gives shape and meaning to all our social practices, including, but not limited to speech and verbal utterances. Writing, weaving, speaking, painting, dancing, poetry, bodily gestures, and the like are all, on this latter view, examples of language. This is important to stress, both methodologically and

conceptually because, as I point out in chapter two, the view of language fifteenth century

European missionaries, ethnographers, and conquistadores relied on was the one inspired

by Cartesian and Empirical epistemologies, and which I critique in chapter one. Finally,

with regard to translations of referenced material, unless otherwise noted, all translations

from Spanish and French into English are my own.

   In closing, I'd like to once again restate my commitments to the concrete

particularities of social life— making this a thesis, not in hermeneutic, but in social-

political, or social philosophy. It seems to me that, more than a decade after Ofelia

Schutte aptly drew attention to "the levels of prejudice affecting the basic processes of

communication between Anglo-American and Latina speakers, as well as the difficulties

experienced by many Latin American immigrants to the United States," these concerns

have not waned but only intensified (1998, 47). Today, with the recent passing of some

of the most stringent anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 and the

heightening of armed violence along the U.S.-Mexico border, "the question of how to

communicate with 'the other' who is culturally different from oneself remains one of the

greatest challenges facing North-South relations and interaction" (ibid). Thus, the project

of pluralizing intercultural discourse ethics to account for the multiplicitous experiences

of postcolonial subjects carries great salience today. This dissertation is just one step

towards this goal.

CHAPTER ONE:

Continental Views of Language: from Cartesian Linguistics to Hermeneutic Feminism

Continental views of language can be understood broadly as those that arose in the European continent during key shifts in philosophic discourse in the late eighteenth century—as manifested in the traditions of German Idealism and Romanticism, and, in the early nineteenth century, hermeneutic thought.[6] They are historically responsive to the model of language that developed in conjunction with modern science and which came to occupy a privileged position in the 'natural sciences' (*Naturwissenschaften*) from the nineteenth century onwards.

Following the successes of the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century and the rise of specialist research culture that accompanied this revolution, the explanatory power of philosophy and the other 'human sciences' (*Geisteswissenschaften*) began to lose the dominant status they once held in the classical period and later, in Renaissance humanist thought. Responding to this intellectual shift, Continental views of language specifically critique the empirical, formalized study of natural languages as a way of explaining how language figures into human understanding. This latter view, which came to prominence in the nineteenth century through modern linguistics and semantic theory, saw language as a rule-governed system capable of securing correct judgment about the mind's ideas through the logical study of propositions (as in the logical positivism of the

Vienna Circle) and semantic content. It stressed the synchronic, rational classification of

linguistic categories as a way to clarify the nature of the medium through which thought

was expressed. The demystification of language thus became a subordinate project to the

demystification of the mind. This tradition, which is entwined with the legacies of

rationalist and empiricist epistemologies, shaped the trajectory of thinkers like A.J. Ayer,

Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, J.L. Austin, Rudolf Carnap and Noam Chomsky.

In *Cartesian Linguistics* (1966), Chomsky traces the development of nineteenth

century semantics back to the Cartesian-inspired work of Antoine Arnauld (1612-1694)

and other seventeenth-century "Port-Royal grammarians" who, like Descartes, believed

language was a reflection of thought (31). He writes:

> Pursuing the fundamental distinction between body and mind, Cartesian
> linguistics characteristically assumes that language has two aspects. In particular,
> one may study a linguistic sign from the point of view of the sounds that
> constitute it and the characters that represent these signs or from the point of view
> of their 'signification,' that is, 'la manière dont les homes s'en servent pour
> signifier leurs pensées (Arnauld, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée,* p.5)…In
> short, language has an inner and an outer aspect. A sentence can be studied from
> the point of view of how it expresses a thought or from the point of view of its
> physical shape, that is, from the point of view of either semantic interpretation or
> phonetic interpretation (32-33).[7]

The meaning of a sentence on this account has very little to do with *what* is said in

conversation—with its expressive content in relation to a human life-world. The principal

concern is rather with the logical operations that make its technical formulation—with

"*how* it expresses a thought"—possible in the first place. As Hans-Georg Gadamer

observes, "the linguist does not want to enter into the discussion of the topic which is

spoken of in the text; rather, he wants to shed light upon the functioning of language as

such, whatever the text may say" (1986, 389).[8] Under the linguist's framework, language retains its character as a mere "instrument of free thought and self-expression" for the autonomous individual and promotes the common notion that "language provides *finite means but infinite possibilities* of expression constrained only by rules of concept formation and sentence formation"(Chomsky, 29, my emphasis).[9] While the rules of sentence formation may be idiosyncratic or arbitrary to a particular time and place, the capacity for language learning and of the "universal conditions that prescribe the form of any human language" are not—they are, for Chomsky as for many Anglophone philosophers of language that follow in this tradition, "reflected in certain fundamental properties of the mind" (59).[10]

This is not what Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and other thinkers associated with the Continental tradition think language is. In fact, for Gadamer, "in opposition to this view of the linguist, that which makes understanding possible is precisely the *forgetfulness* of language" in our everyday worldly involvements (1986, 391). In saying this, Gadamer does not mean that language does not play a role in shaping human understanding—of our sense of our world and our place in it— but just the opposite. It means that language already envelops and inhabits our lives in a more basic, pre-linguistic sense and that our ability to use it pre-reflectively (i.e., without having to stop and think about it)—our 'forgetfulness' of it, so to speak—is indicative of this primordial role. But when we conceive of language itself as the precondition for human understanding—and not in terms nonlinguistic mind-dependent states or biological processes— we realize that

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language cannot then be a private affair, and that its nature must draw instead from a *publicly shared* context to achieve its collective referential power. This context is culture itself, understood in terms of a shared historical tradition. However, the suggestion here is not that culture is necessarily *anterior* to the individual (although 'culture' and 'individual' are already modern categories of analysis), but that the two are, at some very fundamental level, dialogically bound up and intertwined. As Charles Guignon explains, "words and world are seen as interwoven in such a way that to enter into one is simultaneously to master the other. In Wittgenstein's metaphor, 'light dawns gradually over the whole.' Here there is no way to identify a nonsemantic field of meaning which can be grasped independently of the language that serves to constitute it" (1983, 118).

Language, on the Continental view, is therefore a much more complex (non-axiomatizable) human affair that weaves together the various modalities of human experience and practice in a way that is constitutive of, rather than being constituted by, thought. We find this position, for example, in Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling's 1842 assertion that "without language we would be unable to conceive not only of a philosophical consciousness but of a human consciousness in general," such that "the origin of language *cannot* be derived from consciousness" as the empiricist traditions of John Locke (1632-1704) and Étienne Condillac (1715-1780)—which also see thoughts as anterior to their expression in language— suppose (qtd. in Emden, 39). This issue can be better understood by looking at Charles Taylor's seminal distinction between, what he calls, "designative" and "expressivist" views of language.

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I. Taylor on Designative and Expressivist Views of Language

In his essays, "Language and Human Nature" (1985) and "An Issue about

Language" (2006) Charles Taylor tells the story of the origin of language according to

Condillac in order to contrast its features with, what I have been calling, the Continental

view, which he terms the "constitutive" or "expressive" view of language. According to

Taylor, Condillac

> offers a fable, a 'just so' story to illustrate how language might have arisen. It is a
> fable of two children in a desert. We assume certain cries and gestures as natural
> expressions of feeling. These are what Condillac calls 'natural signs'. By contrast,
> language uses 'instituted signs'. Condillac's story is meant to explain how the
> second emerged out of the first. He argues that each child, seeing the other, say,
> cry out in distress, would come to see the cry as a sign of something (e.g. what
> causes distress). He would then be able to take the step of using the sign to refer
> to the cause of distress. The first sign would have been instituted. The children
> would have their first word. Language would be born (1985a, 233).

Following Johann Gottfried Herder's (1744-1803) critique of Condillac in *Über den*

Ursprung der Sprache (1772), Taylor suggests Condillac's fable presupposes the very

thing it's meant to explain: language—specifically, "the passage from a condition in

which the children emit just animal cries to the stage where they use words with

meaning" (2006, 17). What makes words meaningful—how it is that words or gestures

say something in the first place—is what Taylor wants to explain. In Condillac's story a

specific, pre-linguistic association between words, saying, and reason seems to already be

present in the child's cry of distress (i.e., between a sign and some mental content). For

Taylor, "this is the classic case of an enframing theory. Language is understood in terms

of certain elements: ideas, signs, and their association, [and where] the mind is in

control" (ibid).

By 'enframing' theory, Taylor is referring to the compartmentalization of language when viewed as an inert tool or medium for the expression of ideas. This view, echoed in Chomsky's description of language as providing 'infinite' possibilities through 'finite' means (i.e., finite syntax in infinite combinatorial form), portrays language as an "assemblage of separable instruments, which lie as it were transparently to hand, and which can be used to marshal ideas, this use being something we can fully control and oversee" (1985a, 231). An 'enframing' theory of language thus posits the autonomous individual (a *cogito*) as the subject-of-language and gives meaning to words by looking to the semantic correlations between words and things. Because, on this view, words 'say' something by virtue of the things they point to or designate, Taylor also uses the term 'designative theory' to describe this account of meaning: "designative theories, those which make designations fundamental…account for meaning by correlating signs to bits of the world, and these can in principle be identified objectively" (220-21).

For example, under a designative theory of language, the statement "the book is on the table" gains meaning though its referential relation to a specified object, in this case a 'book', and is governed principally by truth conditions that would allow one to verify the relations expressed in it (i.e., that it is indeed on the table). What is left out of this account, for Taylor, is the ways in which the statement, "in a wider sense, might be said to express my anxiety, if there is something particularly fateful about the book's being on the table, or perhaps my relief, if the book were lost" (219). For expression to take shape in this wider sense, books have to *already* have a particular kind of significance for us that is not arbitrary or shaped by mere cultural conventions of word

use, the kind of which we find articulated in Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) *Course in General Linguistics* (1906-11).

For Saussure, "the language we use is a convention, and it makes no difference what exactly the nature of the agreed sign is" by a speech community so long as a collective agreement to use, for instance, "*arbor*" (in Latin) or "*Baum*" (in German) for the mental word-picture 'tree,' exists (239). In either case, both words supposedly refer back to the same psychological representation of sensory impressions, such that a linguistic sign becomes a link between this impression and the concept 'tree'. Saussure can thus claim that "the linguistic sign is arbitrary" because what holds the possibility of intersubjective agreement in place are not words themselves, but the fact that word-signs correspond to "realities localized in the brain" that are universally shared under physicalist (i.e., materialist) doctrines (297).

Saussure offers an intriguing example. A child growing up in a particular "speech-community" or culture, in this case a Chinese child, learns language as one would learn a series of rules that "are quite separate" and detached from speech, but which, taken together, gradually teach a child to play a game or (with respect to speech communication) understand the vocal sounds he hears (ibid). The child then understands the social cues or signs for 'politeness' in his culture on these isolated, aggregative terms; expressions of politeness, such as "prostrating oneself nine times on the ground [as] the way to greet an emperor in China" are seen by Saussure as "fixed by a rule" and "it is this rule which renders them obligatory" to the child rather than the sense in which 'politeness' is *already bound up* within an elaborate network of other social and historical

understandings in Chinese culture—understandings which cannot be made fully

transparent insofar as they are what sustain the meaningfulness of the expression itself

(302).

It is this latter, wider sense of understanding language as an intricately braided,

socio-historical "web" (*Gewebe*) of meaning that Taylor thinks gives weight and import,

in the fullest sense of these terms, not just to statements like 'the book is on the table,' but

to all human expression in general—to acts, practices, and other "symbolic-expressive

creations of man: poetry, music, art, dance, etc" (1985a, 233). Under designative theories,

the expressive dimension of poems, songs, and works of art are particularly problematic

and are often bracketed out as non-literal deviations from everyday propositional speech

acts. For example, Angelus Silesius' poetic saying, "the rose is without why; it blooms

because it blooms" could only, under this view, be interpreted in terms of its semantic

content, content which does not fully make manifest the robustness and range of poetic

expressiveness contained in the phrase (1909, 57). A sharp distinction is thus made

between poetic and everyday, ordinary language, with the former being considered

derivative or 'parasitic' on the latter.[11]

Taylor's view of language, which he calls the "expressive" (1985a) [or

"constitutive" (2006)], does not face such problems because it begins with the

assumption that "language is not coincident, as it were, with that which is expressed in it,

with that in which is formulated in words" (Gadamer 1976, 88). Instead, for Taylor,

language constitutes "a range of activities in which we express/realize a certain way of

being in the world" and "in virtue of which we are capable of the human emotions"—

that is, "of standing in specifically human relations to each other" (1985a, 235). It cannot, therefore, be a mere repository of words (as signs or indexicals) that we subsequently attach meaning to and formalize in dictionaries. For instance, a dictionary, as Heidegger cautions, "has plenty of terms" but "not a single word" precisely "because a dictionary can neither grasp nor keep the word by which the terms become words and speak *as words*" (1971, 87, my emphasis). This "apophantic" activity by virtue of which we pick things out *as* this or that, requires a background of meanings, a shared historical context that give breadth and significance to all human acts and practices—from propositional statements and poetic expressions to bodily gestures like 'swaggers' or 'timidity'. As Chris Lawn explains,

> the expressive power of language is made explicit when we become aware of the full range of activities accompanying articulations. The situation, intentions, unwitting meanings of speakers within the full range of possibilities (tone of voice, modulation, gesture, etc), in short context, expressively contribute to meaning. An aspect of the expressive is the 'constitutive'. Against the thought that language represents the world it is possible to refer to a constitutive role (language doesn't represent the world, it constitutes it as the site of a human world or environment) (2004, 12).

In order to fully understand and situate Taylor's constitutive view of language it is important to give an account of the hermeneutic thought that informs his view. In particular, we need to look at the accounts of language offered by the two central hermeneutic thinkers of the twentieth-century, Heidegger and Gadamer.

II. The Importance of Hermeneutic Philosophy: Heidegger and Gadamer

In "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," Heidegger, writes: "we — mankind — are a conversation. The being of men is founded in language. But this becomes actual in

conversation" (2009, 301).   Gadamer, deeply shaped by Heidegger's notion of language, concurs in saying "language has its true being only in conversation (*Gespräch*)" (1975, 404, hereafter TM). What is meant here is that "conversation is a process of coming to an understanding" about the "subject matter" (*die Sache*)—*what* one says and talks *about* in conversation— that speakers relate to by means of a shared language which is understood as a discursive background of meaning (TM, 387). Rather than a willful act, conversation is something *we undergo*, "fall into," or "become involved in" such that, as Gadamer suggests, "the partners conversing are far less the leaders than the led" (385). The first thing to notice here is that this view of communication differs substantially from the conventional understanding of communication as the mechanistic to and fro of willful speech-acts deployed, through the use or 'tool' of a natural language, by autonomous subjects or *cogitos*. In short, it thoroughly rejects the 'designative' view of language.

For Heidegger, the world is held together and made meaningful by the shared discursive acts and practices that human beings *grow* into. It is because human beings grow into a particular social situation embodied in public expressions, symbols, practices, and rituals that beings make sense to us. On Heidegger's account, therefore, meaning does not reside within a self-contained mind or consciousness, but rather in the world that we're "always already" (*immer schon*) involved in during the course of our everyday lives. Being-in-the-world means to be already bound up, pre-reflectively, with everyday acts and practices. Language, then, understood as an intelligible background of public practices, creates a cultural opening or "clearing" (*Lichtung*) that allows the meaning or significance of things to emerge. In *The Origin of the Work of Art,* Heidegger illustrates

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this point by saying "we never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises in the appearance of things" but rather, what we hear is "the storm whistling in the chimney," "the three-motored plane" or "the difference between the engine roar of a Mercedes from a Volkswagen"; in short, when "we hear the door shut in the house" we hear just this—a door shutting, and "never hear the acoustical sensations or even mere sounds" (152). Likewise, for Gadamer, to 'hear' what the other says in spoken conversation is already to be familiar with what is said insofar as one does not hear a 'bare' vocal sound. Even to hear acoustical sensations as being produced by a larynx is to already perceive the sound in a meaningful way, i.e., as recognizably 'human'; thus, we see here how for both Heidegger and Gadamer, "man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic" (TM, 440).

Thus, on the hermeneutic view of language, to understand something is to already have interpreted it in a certain way so that things speak or have claims over us by virtue of the social contexts in which we are enmeshed: "language," says Gadamer, "is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting" (390) and is in many ways synonymous with it. However, as Heidegger points out "the understanding that arises in interpretation cannot at all be compared to what is elsewhere called understanding," like objective knowledge in the social sciences or a "knowing comportment" in the sense of "intentionality" (1999, 12). This distinction is important because the kind of "understanding" (*Verstehen*) that takes place in conversation rests on *hermeneutical* understanding, which, on this view, is more primordial than scientific "explanation" (*Erklärung*). Hermeneutic understanding is more primordial because scientific explanation is always grounded in a prior background of meaning that makes

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scientific discourse possible to begin with. The scientist makes sense of her world through a ready-made framework of falsifiable causal links, regularities, and patterns in natural laws that she understands through her training as a scientist and by becoming a practitioner in the broader scientific tradition. It is only by virtue of this tradition that she can speak *as* a scientist. More importantly for our purposes, it is also by virtue of this that she can speak to *other* scientists. It is clear she already knows *how to speak* to the other scientist and how to answer them, for "only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning" in a fluid, seamless way, carrying a conversation along without awareness that one is having 'a conversation' at all, much less with another scientist (TM, 360).

The implications of this view are significant because the Cartesian assumption of an objective, Archimedean starting point which grounds the physical sciences can now be seen as just that—an assumption.[12] We are alerted to the fact that scientific practices themselves require a tacit background or interpretive framework. Language or "discourse" (*Rede*), on this account, "must have essentially a kind of being that is specifically worldly" (1962, 161). "Being-in-the-world" therefore becomes articulated as the totality-of-significations that always "carry meaning" in advance of any *interpretation*.

Language, understood this way, is thus not something we stumble upon or 'discover'. Rather, we come into it by "living it" (TM, 386), by growing into it in the course of our everyday lives. On this account, "to come into language does not mean that a second being is acquired" (470) separate from one's concrete being-in-the-world; in fact, when we undergo experiences of things we see that it is just the opposite — that, in

fact, "the language that things have—whatever kind of things they may be—is not the *logos ousias*, and it is not fulfilled in the self-contemplation of an infinite intellect; *it is the language that our finite, historical nature apprehends when we learn to speak*" (471, emphasis added). We see that in conversation a common language is presupposed, where language is the "in-between" (*die Mitte*), the 'medium' which sustains the presence of a dwelling place where beings can emerge in a meaningful way. On this view, "language is not just one of man's possession in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all" (440).[13]

Having explicated the hermeneutic view of language, we are now in a position to return to Gadamer's initial claim that "conversation is a process of coming to an understanding" about the "subject matter" (*die Sache*)—a dative process wherein speakers are far less 'the leaders' than 'the led' (387). First, Gadamer's emphasis on 'subject matter,' or what the conversation is about, now emerges—not as an independent lexical referent in the conversation, as the designative view would hold—but rather as expressing or making manifest something already held in common.[14]

Second, understanding what someone else is talking about depends on a prior sharing or fusion of horizons of meaning. "This is what takes place in conversation," Gadamer argues; it is a process we undergo "in which something is expressed that is not only mine or my author's, *but common*" (390). This 'common' aspect is what is disclos*able*—what can show up or appear— within an already opened space or horizon of meaning.

Third, through the spoken conversation, what unfolds in the ebb and flow of

dialogue is not a truth-claim "under the rubric of rational ideas" (*vernünftige Gedanken*) of some sort (180). Rather, **"what emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know" (361). This means when we intelligibly and coherently relate to the subject matter, a shared language has already been established, recedes into the background, and tacitly supports the meaningful dimension of the conversation. We need only think of how one uses up words in spoken conversation: words are discarded or recede as soon as they are used since "the word is a word only because of what comes into language in it," which is to say that "its own physical being exists only in order to disappear into what is said" (470). With this, all traces of the 'instrumental,' 'speech-act,' 'objectifying,' or 'designative' view of language should disappear from the notion of a hermeneutic conversation. We see that "a hermeneutic conversation, like real conversation…coincides with *the very act of understanding* and reaching agreement" (389, emphasis added).[15]

Because hermeneutical understanding ensures that the meaning of what is said or interpreted can never be closed off in advance (since there is no one 'true' or objective standpoint from which to interpret meaning 'correctly'), to insist on our interpretations as the 'only' possible ones is misguided. However, not every interpretation can resonate with the other speaker; Gadamer is quick to append his call to openness by adding, "but this openness always includes our situating the other meaning in relation to the whole of *our own meanings* or ourselves in relation to it" (Ibid, emphasis added). For Gadamer, if the other person can always, in principle, be right, one should no longer be as concerned

with the rhetorical success of the moves made in conversation. This is, in fact, what leads to inauthentic or corruptive forms of conversation for Gadamer. When we are concerned with muscling our own opinions over and against the other speaker so that we may, from the beginning, win the argument, the conversation has been lost. In fact, in Gadamer's eyes, it never even began because the speakers were not open to really hearing what the other person was saying. Thus, dialogue "requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion" (361).

While we can acknowledge the crucial significance of hermeneutic openness to the other for any genuine dialogue to occur, Gadamer's account neglects the important question of *why* the Western tradition has been motivated to impose universal standards and procedures for dialogue that, in turn, have made it difficult to 'hear' those who reside at the margins of one's own familiar horizon of meaning. To this question, Richard Bernstein has an important reply.

Bernstein characterizes this tendency as one motivated by "Cartesian anxiety," one that attempts to bring order, stability, and control over an otherwise chaotic and contingent world, and being exposed to a strange, foreign culture with a radically different horizon of meaning can remind us of this fundamental contingency. But if we follow fixed, rational procedures, this can "culminate in the calm reassurance that although we are eminently fallible and subject to all sorts of contingencies, we can rest secure in the deepened self-knowledge that we are creatures of a beneficent God who has created us in his image" (1983, 17). We can think of Bernstein's concept as following Nietzsche's suspicion that

> mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other [lived]world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world

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off its hinges and make himself master if it…he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world…language is, in fact, the first stage of the occupation with science (HH I, 11).

However, Cartesian Anxiety does not refer to a psychological state. As Bernstein explains:

> It would be a mistake to think that the Cartesian Anxiety is primarily religious, metaphysical, epistemological, or moral anxiety. These are only several of the many forms it may assume. In Heideggerian language, it is 'ontological' rather than 'ontic,' for it seems to lie at the very center of our being in the world. Our 'god terms' may vary and be very different from those of Descartes. We may even purge ourselves of the quest for certainty and indubitability. But at the heart of the objectivism's vision, and what makes sense of his or her passion, is the belief that there are or must be some fixed, permanent constraints to which we can appeal and which are secure and stable. At its most profound level the relativist's message is that there are no such basic constraints except those that we invent or temporally accept (23).

With Bernstein's conception of Cartesian anxiety, the complicity between scientific objectivism (including the view of language that supports it) and the imperial project in the Americas begins to come into focus. Rooted in an ontological need for control and stability, Cartesian anxiety can be understood as informing the reification of subject-object relations, which invariably turn 'the native' into an object to be manipulated and analyzed by the European ethnographer. However, as we will see in later chapters, the ability to encounter the native not as an object or thing to be exploited but as *a way of being* already nested in a rich and meaningful context of socio-historical and cultural relations seems to be much more viable on the hermeneutic view.

With this overview of hermeneutic accounts of language in place, we get a clearer sense of the fundamental role that Heidegger and Gadamer play in Continental views of language and how these thinkers undermine a number of core assumptions in traditional Anglophone or designative views of language. It is important to note, however, that the

hermeneutic view is not without its critics within the Continental tradition, especially by those, like myself, who are concerned with social, political, and psychically violent implications of language for the postcolonial subject. We can now broaden our discussion by examining the central points of this socio-political critique by its principal architect, Jürgen Habermas.

III. Contemporary Debates: Gadamer and Habermas

Although Habermas does not take up a hermeneutic view of language— opting instead for "the [truth-conditional] semantics founded by Frege and developed through the early Wittgenstein to Davidson and Dummett," a view which "gives center stage to the relation between sentence and state of affairs, between language and the world"[16] (1984, 276)—nonetheless, as David Hoy suggests,

> Habermas can be placed within the framework of hermeneutics because he acknowledges as a direct influence on his own theory the primacy given to understanding by the hermeneutical tradition from Dilthey to Heidegger and Gadamer. His own thesis is that "reaching understanding is the inherent *telos* of human speech" (1995, 127).

Indeed, it is easy to see why, with statements such as, "every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding" (1984, 100), Habermas' debt to the hermeneutic tradition is clear. Beyond this, Habermas can also be placed within the hermeneutic framework insofar as, in offering an account of how understanding between individuals in culture is reached, he rejects the foundational Cartesian subject in favor of a more dialogically inspired "model of the attitude of participants in communication," a model based on "collective like-

mindedness [*Gleichgestimmtheit*]" rather than the monadic product of individual

cognition (1984, 287).

It is important to note that although Habermas privileges an *intersubjective* model

of 'communicative rationality' based on the normative standards and expectations of

lived, social contexts, as a composite feature of this rationality, he still retains the

traditional model of the intentional Cartesian subject. According to Habermas' own

definition, "the term 'reaching understanding' [*Verständigung*] means, at the minimum,

that *at least two speaking and acting subjects* understand a linguistic expression in the

same way" (307, my emphasis). Drawing on Max Weber's action theory, which

distinguishes between different kinds of action and corresponding rationality in society

(Weber, 1978, 4), Habermas wants to illustrate a model of rationality and human agency

that emphasizes (what he believes to be) the reciprocal, communicative relation between

individuals interacting in everyday life, and which serve as the basis for coordinating

action plans between them. The key will be to then offer a rational reconstruction of the

process by which such coordination is achieved in a non-coercive, non-manipulative

fashion—something Habermas believes to be possible by virtue of the "inescapable

presuppositions" found in the very *process* of coming to an understanding through

rational, argumentative discourse (1976, 30). What makes argumentative discourse the

foci of reciprocal, unconstrained agreement between people is that, for Habermas, "the

idea of impartiality is rooted *in* the structures of argumentation *themselves* and does not

need to be brought in from the outside as supplementary normative content"(2001, 75-

76). Following a procedural model of rational argumentation—where argumentation is

seen "as a special form of rule-governed interaction"— can thus offer certain guarantees

against "repression and inequality" in speech situations by presenting us with "a form of communication that adequately approximates ideal conditions" (88). It is the process that is key for Habermas, and this process, in turn, is intersubjectively valid because it rests on formal rules that "spring spontaneously from our intuitive grasp of what argumentation is" (92).[17]

On the whole, Habermas' overall shift in emphasis from individuals to community derives from his cautionary wariness of the negative aspects of the Enlightenment tradition, especially of the instrumental (or 'purposive,' means-ends) rationality criticized in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). His goal, however, is not to criticize this tradition but to redeem it by producing a more robust account of rationality that can accommodate the shared aspects of consensual, deliberative democratic procedures in public life and downplay the instrumental, goal-directed acts of autonomous, individual agents. Habermas worries that an independently acting ego committed towards "reaching success" will orient their actions teleologically towards private interests and can potentially lead to totalitarian or authoritative social realities. Societies focused on the continual employment of other-directed 'communicative rationality'— which Habermas thinks is the "*original* mode of language use" upon which all modes are 'parasitic' (1984, 288)—will help thwart such tendencies in public and political life.

Thus, for Habermas, the hermeneutic process of 'coming to an understanding' is based on a radically different set of premises from hermeneutic understanding, sufficient to posit a theory of social or "communicative action" that goes *far beyond* the goals of

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hermeneutics, and aims instead at reaching concrete forms of intersubjective *agreement* between speakers. He writes:

> The goal of coming to an understanding [*Verständigung*] is to bring out an agreement [*Einverständnis*] that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding *validity claims* of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness and rightness (1979, 3, my emphasis).

Because Habermas adopts a designative view of language from the Analytic philosophical tradition—a view whose heritage he readily acknowledges and sketches out himself— Habermas believes "we can explain the concept of reaching understanding only if we specify what it means to use sentences with communicative intent" (1984, 287)—and this, in turn, will involve a reductive account of language as a series of truth-conditional speech acts which accurately convey our intentions to other speakers and provide the background material necessary for coordinating joint plans of action in the social sphere. Thus, Habermas thinks that "if we take as our unit of analysis a simple speech act carried out by *S*, to which at least one participant in interaction can take up a "yes" or "no" position, we can clarify the conditions for the communicative coordination of action by stating what it means for a hearer to understand what is said" (101). Two things are involved here: the nature of the conditions under which speech communication effectively coordinates actions between individuals, and what it means for individuals to actually understand one another through their speech acts. For Habermas, "we understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable" in the particular normative life-world from which it derives its validity, which presupposes a particular conception of rationality (297):

> In contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by

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pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations. We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure his critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing particular consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter (15).

While for Gadamer, being able to 'accept a speech act' is something we do *pre-reflectively* by virtue of a shared history, for Habermas it remains an *intentional* act between 'at least two speaking and acting subjects' using reflective consciousness, each of whom retains the capacity to judiciously accept or reject the other's claims. This is key for Habermas, as it points us towards a *non-authoritative* view of rationality as fallible knowledge that only achieves its "binding force" in the procedural to-and-fro of two or more communicatively acting agents. He writes:

> These reflections point in the direction of basing the rationality of an expression on its being susceptible of criticism and grounding: an expression satisfies the precondition for rationality if and insofar as it embodies *fallible knowledge* and therewith has a relation to the objective world (that is, a relation to the facts) and is open to objective judgment (1984, 9).

This, then, leads us to Habermas' principal criticism of Gadamer. The famous 'debate' between Habermas and Gadamer began in the 1960's when Habermas, some 30 years his junior, read Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and published a book review containing a seminal critcism of Gadamer's rehabilitation of the concept of "tradition". The critiques from this review, first published in German in *Philosophische Rundschau* (1967, English translation 1977) were then expanded in a section titled "the hermeneutic approach" in Habermas' *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (1970). In particular, Habermas raised concerns that Gadamer's emphasis on 'the authority of tradition' as the precondition for human understanding was too conservative and restricted the possibility of social

change—of taking a possible standpoint *outside* tradition in order for social agents to

challenge or critique it. According to Habermas, historical traditions—even if they

provide the normative background against which understanding takes place— must, in

principle, be open to criticism in the same way that reason, for Habermas, first embodies

fallible knowledge, and on those grounds does not pose a threat of "instrumental

mastery" over us (1984, 11). For this reason, Habermas charges that "hermeneutics

comes up against the walls of the traditional framework from the inside, as it were" and

potentially renders—to use one example, the protestational acts and practices of political

claimants mute against authoritative regimes (1977, 360).

Before considering Gadamer's reply, to fully appreciate Habermas' position it is

essential to first understand it in terms of the lived commitments and historical influences

that shaped his philosophical project. As Richard Bernstein explains:

> The world in which Habermas grew up and came to intellectual maturity, which
> coincides with the rise and fall of Nazi Germany, was virtually a totally different
> world than the one in which Gadamer grew up. Whereas Gadamer's primary
> experience has been one of historical continuity, the primary formative experience
> for Habermas was that of discontinuity—the trauma of almost a total break with
> tradition. Many commentators of Habermas tend to ignore or downplay the
> specific historical circumstances that had a decisive influence on him during the
> decades of the 1940s through the 1960s: the collapse of Nazi Germany, the
> discovery by Germans only after the war of the immensities of the horrors of this
> era, and the hope of making a new beginning. Yet we fail to adequately
> understand even Habermas' most theoretical work if this context is ignored. What
> impressed Habermas, as a young student, was the failure of twentieth-century
> German culture to provide a serious counterthrust to the rise of Nazi ideology
> (1983, 177).

Thus, although Habermas was Adorno's assistant at the Institute of Social Research in

Frankfurt, he largely rejected the radically pessimistic view of the Enlightenment project

shared by Adorno, and what would later be known as the 'Frankfurt School' of Critical

Theory. As a neo-Marxist shaped by the lived concerns of a post-holocaust social and political milieu, Habermas was compelled to retain a belief in the emancipatory powers of reflective processes against the distortions produced by ideology. However, insofar as he understood the deep complicity between instrumental, means-ends rationality and the Nazi project of racial cleansing, a project that hauntingly reached the level of *official, bureaucratic, and legal* sanctioning in Nazi Germany, Habermas remained committed to a more critical model of rationality—*but one which still had to retain* the critical capacity to unveil ideology's distortive lens on society. In this respect, Habermas is still tied to the project of modernity but in a much more critical, rehabilitative sense.

From this perspective, the notion of drawing our understandings from an apparently unmovable historical background of interpretive possibilities—which form our 'prejudgments' and which Gadamer calls 'tradition'—cannot help but be deeply problematic for Habermas. This is because, on this view, social actors cannot "work themselves free of the form of life in which they *de facto* find themselves" (1996, 163). If our historical traditions are dominated by racist, sexist, even totalitarian values and social practices, how are we to shake ourselves free of the 'de facto situation in which we find ourselves' without an objectively independent standpoint to appeal to that is (and for Habermas *must* be) outside this tradition? An independent standpoint that can guide us as to the possible harms of such outlooks, even by making appeals that reference our own normative cultural standards? For Habermas, the objective power of reflection is this 'independent' standpoint, such that, on his account,

> Gadamer fails to appreciate the power of reflection that is developed in understanding. This type of reflection is no longer blinded by the illusion of an absolute, self-grounded autonomy and does not detach itself from the soil of contingency on which it finds itself. But in grasping the genesis of the tradition

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from which it proceeds and on which it turns its back, reflection shakes the dogmatism of life-practices (1977, 357).

The same year Habermas' review of *Truth and Method* appeared, Gadamer published his reply in an essay titled "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" (1967 original, reprinted in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, hereafter PH). Gadamer's reply is two-tiered. First, he thinks Habermas has fundamentally misread or overlooked key passages in *Truth and Method* where Gadamer points to the flexive, open-ended aspect of tradition without losing any of its 'authoritative' aspect on how we first come to make sense of things in understanding. Second, he points to Habermas' own presuppositions that would make him overlook or misinterpret such passages. According to Gadamer:

> The presupposition is that reflection, as employed in the hermeneutical sciences, should 'shake the dogmatism of life-praxis.' Here indeed is operating a prejudice that we can see is pure dogmatism, *for reflection is not always and unavoidably a step towards dissolving prior convictions.* Authority is not *always* wrong. Yet Habermas regards it as an untenable assertion and treason to the heritage of the Enlightenment, and the act of rendering transparent the structure of prejudgments in understanding should possibly lead to an acknowledgment of authority. Authority is by his definition a dogmatic power. I cannot accept the assertion that reason and authority are abstract antitheses, as the emancipatory Enlightenment did. Rather, I assert that they stand in a basically ambivalent relation, a relation I think should be explored rather than causally accepting the antithesis as a 'fundamental conviction' (PH 32-33).

For Gadamer, it would be a mistake to see tradition as purely 'conservative' in the sense of immovable structures. In *Truth and Method* he clarifies that "tradition is not simply a *permanent* precondition; rather, we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves" (293, emphasis added). One way to get a better grasp on this concept is through the idea that language (on the hermeneutic model) is realized in speech. As Taylor notes, "men are

constantly shaping language [as speech], straining the limits of expression, minting new terms, displacing old ones, giving language a changed gamut of meanings," and yet, following Heidegger and Gadamer, these "new coinages are never quite autonomous, quite uncontrolled by the rest of language. They can only be introduced and make sense because they already have a place within the web, which must at any moment be taken as given over by far the greater part of its extent" (1985a, 232). Picasso's *Guernica* or Rothko's abstractionism are in this sense new perspectives in Western aesthetic practice, ones which only make sense as new perspectives when considered against the old ones; in fact, the old perspectives of realism act as kind of unconscious backdrop and are necessary to give abstractionist paintings the very meaning they possess *as* 'abstractionist,' as departure from realism. Here, Taylor explicates Gadamer's concept of tradition through Otto Neurath's (1882-1945) image of remaking a boat while at sea:

> We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction (1973, 199).

In reply to Habermas' criticism, Gadamer argues that tradition is not binding in the sense that no new interpretations are possible, but only in the sense that what we say to each other is going to already be shaped and guided in advance by a specific historical horizon that is never, in principle, fixed and static. For Gadamer, the meaning of what one says to another in conversation "represents a fluid multiplicity of possibilities" and yet, "within this multiplicity of what can be thought" or talked about, "not everything is possible"' because one must always "be able to fit" what one has heard—even as a misunderstanding—into the pre-figured "range" of one's own "various expectations of

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meaning" (TM, 271). One must have a horizon if one is to hear at all. Or, in Heidegger's

words: "only he who already understands is able to listen" (1962, 161). We take up

stances against totalitarian regimes or undertake social transformations against certain

values because we already, in a deep sense, value principles of fairness, justice, and the

good of all. But this latter perspective is relative only to a particular historical tradition

where such values are interpretive possibilities in the first place. As Paul Feyerabend, in

Science and a Free Society, explains

> Being a tradition is neither good nor bad, it simply is. The same applies, to all
> traditions—they are neither good nor bad, they simply are. They become good or
> bad (rational/irrational; pious/impious; advanced/primitive; humanitarian/vicious;
> etc.) only when looked at from the point of view of some other tradition.
> 'Objectively' there is not much to choose between anti-Semitism and
> humanitarianism, but racism will appear vicious to a humanitarian while
> humanitarianism will appear vapid to a racist (1978, 8-9).

For Gadamer, we are not slaves to tradition. The fact that we are shaped by both

humanistic values *and* have histories steeped in instrumental rationality means we are in

a unique position to mitigate between these traditions through the kinds of practices we

take up and in light of how these traditions have been received. Thus, Gadamer replies to

Habermas in saying that

> from the hermeneutical standpoint, rightly understood, it is absolutely absurd to
> regard the concrete factors of work and politics as outside the scope of
> hermeneutics. What about the vital issue of prejudices…Where do they come
> from? Merely out of 'cultural tradition'? Surely they do, in part, but what is the
> tradition formed from? It would be true when Habermas asserts that
> 'hermeneutics bangs helplessly, so to speak, from within against the walls of
> tradition,' if we understand this 'within' as opposite to an 'outside' that *does not
> enter* our world—our to-be-understood, understandable, or non-understandable
> world—but remains the mere observation of external alternations (instead of
> human actions) (PH 31).

The wide gulf that then divides Habermas and Gadamer centers on the extent to which, in

being able to reshape tradition without dominating it, human beings (or for Habermas

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'social actors') retain control of this process. Gadamer's position, as Taylor explains it, is that in reshaping tradition "without dominating it, or being able to oversee it…we never fully know what we are doing to it"; to use the speech analogy suggested earlier, "we develop language without knowing fully what we are making it into" (1985a, 232). Because of their significantly different starting points and lived commitments, this is a gulf that cannot be bridged between the two thinkers.[18] In a letter to Richard Bernstein, Gadamer concedes as much:

> I too am in favor of a government and politics that would allow for mutual understanding and the freedom of all. But this is not due to the influence of Habermas. It has been self-evident to any European since the French Revolution, since Hegel and Kant. But I am not talking about what is to be done in order to realize this state of affairs. Rather, I am concerned with the fact that the displacement of human reality never goes so far that no forms of solidarity exist any longer (as qtd. in Bernstein, 1983, 264).[19]

And so the impasse stands.

Yet, there have been important attempts at reconciliation between these two philosophical positions. In her essays, "Communicative Rationality and Cultural Values" (1995) and "Hermeneutics, Tradition, and the Standpoint of Women" (1994) Georgia Warnke attempts to do this by way of feminist concerns.[20] Warnke's aims are particularly important for the purposes of my project because she constructively engages both the limitations and possibilities of Habermas's social democratic thought while at the same time acknowledging the potentially oppressive and inescapable nature of Gadamer's hermeneutic situation.

Warnke criticizes Habermas' use of "the normative principles that are justified in discourse" on the grounds that the *mechanism* by which actual negotiation of interpretive

differences can take place is limited to 1) a restrictive model of argumentative speech and 2) procedural observation of 'the rules of discourse' (1994, 135). For Warnke, the underlying assumption here is that reasoned argument is indeed impartial and capable of altogether transcending particular socio-historical contexts, contexts which include important gendered and sexual differences that affect, for example, *how* communication shows up for women.

On this view, one way to look at the problem of communicative action is that it "attempts to abstract from [cultural] history and complexity to find neutral foundations for universal principles" based on a model of reasoned interaction in ideal speech communication (1994, 209). While Habermas' approach is not attentive to difference in the way Warnke envisions, neither does she think we can transcend these differences objectively: "we cannot rise above the tradition to understand ourselves and our social situation without the blinders the tradition forces upon us" (1995, 220). Here Warnke is clearly following Gadamer and his criticism that Habermas does not acknowledge the extent to which there is no neutral, value-free, isolated standpoint from which we may make privileged judgments or deliberations. Although Warnke is sympathetic to the social democratic motivations for Habermas' project, a larger question for deliberative democratic models of speech communication remains, namely: what if

> the very language of a tradition can be the source of power and domination? What are we to do about the distortions within our thick vocabulary that render women mute or serve to deflate or deconstruct the expressions of their concerns? In this case, *it will not be enough to insist that women be allowed the opportunity to talk,* for the language in which they might speak may be one that cannot be responsive to their needs or interests (215, my emphasis).

And yet, Warnke also thinks Gadamer's appeal to historical traditions, including his critique of "subjectivism" has more than a mere "conservative tint"; according to

Warnke,

> in appealing to our history and interpretive traditions as the ground for our reflections, critical or otherwise, Gadamer tends to play down the extent to which this ground is one of struggle and debate. Hence, he also plays down the degree to which traditions require the solicitation and support of their adherents who cannot, therefore, be seen as simple flickers in the closed circuits of historical life but are active participants in the meaning a tradition comes to possess (1994, 223).

What this shows is that Warnke is a hermeneutic thinker. We see this commitment in her explanation that Gadamer does not neglect, but only 'plays down' the regenerative role of social agents in interpreting (and thus shaping) their own historical traditions. But she is also a social-political theorist concerned with practical issues of lived experience, which include the experience of women and the role of gender in social institutions and the law. However, Warnke's views are important to my project not merely because she finds important points of contact in these two conflicting critiques, but because she is pursuing a project of *applied* hermeneutics that is attentive to the heterogeneous, practical concerns of marginalized social actors while recognizing the immense influence of the movement of history on these concerns. This is to say that, unlike Gadamer, Warnke is not concerned with outlining transcendental conditions for the possibility of meaning, but rather with how we can apply this meaning in everyday social situations with respect to the complex concerns of those marginalized. She calls this approach "Hermeneutic Feminism".[21]

For Warnke, "hermeneutic feminism will be pluralistic" and will attend to the diverse interpretive stances taken by women positioned in radically dissimilar speaking situations, marked, as she notes, by various racial, ethnic and sexual identifications

(intra-culturally as well as cross-culturally) (225). Moreover, hermeneutic feminism's emphasis on difference and plurality sheds a more inclusive light on the hermeneutic concept of historical traditions. I will later argue that this attentiveness to the plurality and complex specificity of lived-experiences for the marginalized is essential in articulating an interpretive space that is capable of addressing the fractured and multiplicitous experience of selfhood that characterizes the postcolonial subject.

In this chapter, I have attempted to offer an overview of Continental views of language, broadly conceived. In doing so, I situated these views within the hermeneutic tradition, identified core ideas of hermeneutic discourse as they emerge in the work of Heidegger, Gadamer and Taylor, show how these ideas undermine fundamental assumptions in mainstream Anglophone views of language, and articulate how these hermeneutic ideas have been critically engaged by Habermas and Warnke. In the proceeding chapters, my aim is to show how Warnke's approach succeeds in broadening the hermeneutic horizon to more accurately account for the experiences of women but is largely unable to address the embodied concerns of *postcolonial* women whose meaningful histories have been forcefully erased by colonialism. I hope to show that this loss of a background of meaning adds a layer of complexity that neither hermeneutics nor hermeneutic feminism can account for, but which is essential to articulate in order to shed light on the conditions of marginalization affecting intercultural dialogue. However, to get a grip on this problem we first need to examine the effect of colonialism on language, including its effect on the interpretive possibilities made available in culture. We turn to this issue in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO:

Intercultural Dialogue and the Problem of Colonized Languages: A Feminist Approach

> La lengua ha sido testimonio de la opresión y del imperialismo: lo que a finales del siglo XV era una realidad histórica, por más que la humanidad se lastime, en el siglo XX sigue siendo instrumento de intervención y de extorsión de las conciencias.

--Manuel Alvar, 1986

> This is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you.

--Adrienne Rich, 1966

Within feminist theory, there has often been special attention paid to the discursive space required for women to effectively participate in the interpretive processes of culture without having to perform great feats of linguistic and psychic dexterity. Historically, the call to alter, enlarge, and transform this space has centered on the awareness that performing such tasks, while allowing women to engage in public dialogue and moral deliberation through a determinate location of their voice within preexisting social norms and standards, typically comes at the expense of radical differences and complex intersections of multiple categories of self-identification, including those of race, sex, gender, class and ethnicity (Frye 1983, Jaggar 1998, Lugones 2006, Young 2002, Schutte 1998, Spivak 1988). In this chapter, I would like to

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extend this project to the complicated epistemic labors performed by postcolonial subjects in the course of intercultural dialogue.

My approach will be to address the lived concerns of historically marginalized communities—specifically, the pressing need of native Amerindian speakers to negotiate everyday legal, social, and economic matters within European-style institutions—through a hermeneutic analysis of the conditions of conversation that underlie such negotiations. As we saw in chapter one, it is by giving a primarily *historical* account of the barriers involved in coming to an understanding in intercultural conversation that the hermeneutic approach differs from Habermas' influential analysis of speech situations, an analysis based on the "*formal presuppositions of intersubjectivity* that are necessary if we are to be able to refer to something in the one objective world, identical for all observers, or to something in our intersubjectively shared social world" (1984, 50). My project does not attempt to bridge the gap between different or 'competing' cultural accounts of the "one objective world" through a norm-seeking enterprise of rational justifications and validity claims. Unlike Habermas, I do not ask about "what norms, indeed what *universal* norms, are appropriate for critically evaluating competing traditions, and competing cultural claims" (Bernstein 1996, 40). My question, rather, is historical; it follows Gloria Anzaldúa's methodological insight that, since postcolonial life gives rise to a unique set of contradictory cultural experiences (from inhabiting multiple yet conflicting frames of reference), the first step towards producing an account capable of "documenting our struggles" and communicating our sense of rupture is "to take inventory" (1987, 104).

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Taking inventory, in the historical sense, is especially difficult in colonial situations because of the intricate heterogeneity of background assumptions (e.g., the Indian, European, Anglo) that often clash with one another, and which, over time, make it difficult to distinguish between the inherited, acquired, and forcibly imposed ("lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto") in culture (ibid). The shared cultural heritage of postcolonials is not, on this account, an unproblematic plurality of mixed historical traditions fusing over time into a stable, collective framework of interpretive reference: Indian and European/Anglo traditions are, and have been from the very beginning, asymmetrically positioned, with European interpretive practices dominating the former—but without successfully sublating it altogether.[22] Giving a more robust account of the problems and difficulties involved in speaking from colonial situations is thus an important step in not only pluralizing intercultural discourse ethics, but also in legitimating the creative efforts and linguistic tactics of beings caught in the midst of articulative difficulties and internalized feelings of, what might be called, 'inarticulacy'.

To this end, I am concerned with the following question: If meaningful communication is possible only on the basis of a shared socio-historical background of discursive acts and practices, what happens to a marginal culture's ability to effectively communicate and make sense of the world when—as is the case with European colonialism—these acts and practices have been covered-over, shattered, or destroyed (whether in part or in whole)? What happens to one's ability to render their experience of the socio-historical world through language (as understanding) if, as Serge Gruzinski argues in *La Colonisation de L'imaginaire* (1988), the resources of expression have

themselves been colonized through Western epistemic orthodoxies such as subject/predicate language and the conventions of Western literary practices?

Take, for example, the Dominican Domingo de Santo Tomás's (1499-1570) account of Qechua, an Amerindian language, as "a language so in agreement with Latin and Castilian in its structure that it looks almost like a premonition that the Spaniards will possess it," not, of course, by living it, but by transcoding it into alphabetic form, setting down rules of orthography, and Latinizing it (qtd. in Mignolo 1995, 48). The idea that Mayans dwelled in an understanding of language as a rationalized logical structure is an Occidental prejudice that formed the basis for its subsequent trans-codification through the Latin alphabet. This forceful re-territorialization of language seems to problematize one of the most pivotal notions in modern discourse ethics: securing the conditions for uncoerced, equitable argumentation.

Generally, this is taken to mean that one cannot be said to have a conviction if, as Habermas argues, that conviction was formed "under conditions that simply do not permit for the formation of convictions"—conditions like duress, deceit, but also different forms of social injustice and oppression (Habermas 2001, 90). The problem of colonized languages is that oppression is also rooted in the mechanism by which 'one forms convictions' in the first place, and, to complicate matters, to remove this constraint as a source of possible oppression would potentially render large social sectors mute. In this respect, the hermeneutic view of language outlined in chapter one offers a much broader conception of human communication (rather than reducing it to the propositional content of human locution) more hospitable to talking about non-Western and Native Amerindian notions of communication. Such notions may rely on substantially different

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relations between self and world, where to speak (in Nahuatl), for example, is to "flower-

sing on and on, to rejoice with flowers" (*xochicuicuicatinemio*) and henceforth 'give the

voice' (*nontlatoa*) that is collectively required for a world to be sung into existence

(Leon-Portilla 1962). In *The Singing of the New World* (2007), Gary Tomlinson carefully

points out that

> The duality of literal and figurative language is all told a Western importation to
> the Mexica mentality; the indigenous construction of the world connected things
> to other things in a network of extraordinary, more than Western complexity and
> intimacy… the expression of one thing in another was, therefore, a real
> connection—a metonymic one, again, involving the interplay of adjoining parts of
> a whole (41).

The hermeneutic view can also address how *non-lexical* vocables (a linguistic term for

recognizable terms or utterances) in an oral tradition, such as singing, nasal stress or

intonated rhythms, can be meaningful in reference to a wider whole. However, there are

limitations. While hermeneutic philosophy can help contextualize some of the difficulties

involved in cross-cultural communication in general, I want to suggest that feminism's

aim of questioning structures of oppression and the homogenous nature of human identity

can focus better attention on the complex ways European Colonialism impacted

Amerindian peoples, especially at the level of language.

I.   Between 'novel metaphors' and 'new idioms': Feminism, Language, and
     Postcoloniality

While there has been general consensus amongst feminist theorists about the

existence of cultural double binds and discursive constraints noted earlier, there has also

been great debate about how to go about transforming them. One general disagreement

has to do with the extent to which radical transformations in the social sphere are possible given the deep historical embeddedness of masculine narratives, texts and practices in Western culture, along with the question of which tactics to employ in response. As feminists, for example, we may want to do more than merely integrate women into existing social hierarchies or structures of power, which, as Graciella Hierro put it, "construct power to oppose the other power" but do little in the way of promoting a deeper, "ontological vision" of eventually displacing the very centrality of gender subordination coursing throughout the many interlaced levels of culture, and which keep oppression a primarily 'structural', rather than 'personal', affair (1994, 10).

Attempting changes at this deeper level, however, runs up against the oft-cited difficulty of how to even go about "analyzing our own exploitation…while being inscribed within an order prescribed by the masculine" (Irigaray, 1977, 81). The most striking example of this kind of exploitation is through embodying the acts and practices of our own language. As Judith Butler explains:

> …we have a description of a self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves…so that when one speaks, one speaks a language that is already speaking, even if one speaks it in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before (2004, 69).

The idea that radical new possibilities for social change can come about as a result of women's ongoing public battles for legal or political reform, on this view, have to be met with tempered expectations of what the norms of moral and political discourse will allow to count *as change*, as well as what the grammatical conventions of the syntax used in these struggles will allow (in terms of possibilities) for describing our grievances and experiences of oppression. Thus, from a feminist perspective, a tension exists between

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the view of the subject as linguistically constituted and the degree to which we are free to determine meaning and have semantic authority over our own self-descriptions.

For Luce Irigaray, the sedimentation of masculine norms in language happen to place "so strong a bearing of things" that the only way to produce new meanings in a largely patriarchal life-world (understood as a signifying economy) is to step outside it and construct a new one to run as a parallel script (1993, 67). While Irigaray retains a view of language on the model of the linguist (where at maximum, we are co-constituted by language but remain separate from it as tool-users), Butler, on the other hand, cannot conceive of a way to ever step outside language because, for her, we are through and through linguistic beings whose identities are no more and no less than the discursive *effects* of a historically unique pattern of enacting certain social scripts—or of 'performing' them. Just as "there is no reference to a *pure* body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body," for Butler there is no subject anterior to its emergence in a cultural and historical field in which subjects make sense or learn to signify *as* 'social agents' (1993, 10; 1990, 145). Without this 'discursive' background there are no 'bodies *that* matter', as the title of her book suggests, but also no public sphere to try to change, and no identities to reject, take up, reconfigure or defend— including those based on gender.[23]

As a Foucauldian shaped by both the phenomenological tradition and psychoanalysis, Butler is able to balance the rejection of the Cartesian subject with the need to address the concrete experiences of physical and psychic wounds that befall the subject, regardless of the social construction of both the wounded and the wound. The

subject may be a fiction, but it is a fiction we must live to live at all; the point then, is to

pursue a radical feminist politics precisely by recognizing that these limitations exist, and

that in order to transform them we must first wrestle with the deep imprint they place on

what we consider as our bodies, voices, lives and 'selves'. Thus, on her view, one way to

maneuver through the restrictions placed by language and the sociohistorical construction

of our identities is by recognizing "the possibility of a complex *re*configuration and

*re*deployment" of the categories of meaning we grow into, and which invariably keep us

within the bounds of a given cultural horizon (1990, 145, my emphasis). This means that

while "there is no subject prior to its constructions" it is not the case that the subject is

totally determined by those constructions:

> It is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to
> resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the 'we' cannot be summarily
> refused, but neither can they be followed in *strict* obedience. It is *the space of this
> ambivalence* which opens up the possibility of a reworking of the very terms by
> which subjectivation proceeds—and fails to proceed (1993, 124, my emphasis).

In what is admittedly difficult prose,[24] Butler straddles the line between

hermeneutics and post-structuralism, arguing for an expansion of what can possibly be

articulated within the bounds of what already can, but with the general aim of expanding

the plenum of the possible over time. Specifically, for Butler, we must start social

transformations by soberly acknowledging that there are no tools outside of the master's

tools, that "there is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking

up' is enabled by the tool lying there," and proceed by trying to find creative ways of

"public misappropriation," misuse and mimicry of shared terms, acts, and practices so as

to destabilize their meaning (1990, 145). By disrupting the flow of expectation and

fulfillment of meanings, we call attention to the way things normally look or work in

their default mode, and which allows the normative feeling of our world to hold.[25] For

Butler, performing parodies, inappropriate gestures and cross-dressing would all be ways

of subverting norms while still relying on them, and taken as a whole with other

practices, "constitutes the basis of an *ironic hopefulness* that the conventional relation

between word and wound might become tenuous and even broken over time" (1997a,

100, my emphasis).

In this respect, Butler's approach bears resemblance to Richard Rorty's notion of

'novel metaphors' as a guide to social change. For Rorty, "creative misuses of

language—familiar words used in ways that initially sound crazy" are ways of

recontextualizing existing beliefs and attitudes that, over time, can make "alternative

descriptions of what is happening" acceptable in culture, such that, eventually,

"something traditionally regarded as a moral abomination can become an object of

general satisfaction" (1998, 204). The problem with this framework, as Christopher

Voparil rightly points out, is that the "we" for whom these novel redescriptions of

experience become acceptable or "gain in popularity" remains uncontested:

> The picture [Rorty] sketches of the 'new language' of marginalized groups
> gradually being 'woven into the language taught in the schools' does not pay
> sufficient attention to the beliefs and desires within the larger society that worked
> to exclude these groups in the first place. That is, while Rorty's diagnosis of the
> condition of 'meaninglessness' in which marginalized groups can find themselves
> and proposal for achieving semantic authority offer valuable resources, we must
> also perceive the ways that this linguistic silencing is part of the functioning of the
> dominant discourse. Focusing only on 'the larger society coming to terms with
> something new' obscures the power of both structural and discursive formations
> to oppress and exclude (2010).

The difference between Rorty and Butler, on this particular account, lies in Butler's

attentiveness to forces of power and oppression in culture. In "The Question of Social

Transformation," Butler highlights the need to heed such forces, even if that means

foregoing her theoretical framework of subverting norms from within (that is, by appealing to them in the process): She writes, "what moves me politically, and that for which I want to make room, is the moment in which a subject—a person, a collective—asserts a right or entitlement to a livable life when no such prior authorization exists, when *no clearly enabling convention* is in place" at the level of shared norms or cultural practices (2004, 224, my emphasis).

This move gestures towards another equally important tactic for social change in feminist theory, one that has grown out of women's concrete experiences of *lived* suffering (including the urgency of addressing oppression) and calls for a politics of self-determination. That is to say, in the course of our practical dealings and worldly engagements, there may or may not be a recognition of the deep, historical imbrication of masculine narratives in culture—a recognition which, in either case, is subordinated to one's awareness that "this is the oppressor's language, yet I need it to talk to you" (Rich 1966).

Under this approach, the realm emphasized is the practical realm, the one in which women must speak, act, advocate for specific interests, make use of cultural norms, and mobilize politically in the midst of asymmetrical power relations, both within culture and across them. Thus, the primary focus of this approach to feminist inquiry becomes the need to articulate and vocalize what are often very complex, liminal experiences—or simply those that cannot be voiced within a dominant cultural discourse— in order to address felt harms and seek public redress of wrongs. Under this rubric, effecting social change at deeper interpretive levels may still guide feminist inquiry, but to do this, as Gloria Anzaldúa argues,

we must have very concrete, precisely worded intentions of what we want the world to be like, what *we* want to be like. We have to first put the changes that we want made into words or images. We have to visualize them, write them, communicate them to other people and stick with committing to those intentions, those goals, those visions. Before any changes can take place you have to say and intend them (2000, 290).

However, intending and saying those goals, on the hermeneutic view, requires a background language in which those intentions make sense or matter in a particular ways—a pre-predicative web of meanings which prefigures one's 'intentions' and which continually relates individual parts to a larger whole. Under philosophical hermeneutics, there is no way out of this 'circle' or 'situation'. It is, as Gadamer says, fundamentally "universal and basic for all interhuman experience" (1976, 30). In *The Politics of Reality* (1983) Marilyn Frye has indirectly challenged the universality of hermeneutical understanding from the perspective of subjects who, due to historical marginalization in culture, fail to experience a smooth continuity of meaning. On Frye's view, as beings already marginalized on the basis of sex and gender,

> we fear that if we are not in that web of meaning there will be no meaning: our work will be meaningless, our lives of no value, our accomplishments empty, our identities illusory…This is a terrible disability. If we have no intuition of ourselves as independent, unmediated beings in the world, then we cannot conceive of ourselves surviving our liberation …we have to dare to rely on ourselves to *make meaning* and we have to imagine ourselves capable of …weaving the web of meaning which will hold us in some kind of intelligibility (80, my emphasis).[26]

Weaving our own web of meaning is not without precedent in the Continental philosophical tradition. Like Frye's insistence on a creative politics of self-determination, Jean-François Lyotard's call "to institute new addressees, new addressors, new significations, and new referents in order for the wrong to find an expression and for the plaintiff to cease being a victim" relies on a picture of the self as an active social agent

capable of producing meaning and having semantic authority over their own self-descriptions (1988, 13). According to David Carroll, for Lyotard, "totalitarianism is precisely any principle or system that prevents victims…from testifying to the injustice they have experienced, and from testifying to it *in their own idiom*, which may not be, or most likely is not admissible according to the regulations used to determine historical reality or truth" (1984, 78).

In recent years, postcolonial feminisms have contributed to this discussion by highlighting the need for *both* approaches to social change—for novel metaphors that acknowledge the irreducible imprint of colonial history on our lives and speaking situations, and for new idioms that can speak directly to the social and political emergencies instituted by that history—be it through poetry, avant-garde art or transgressive social protest, to name a few examples (Richard 2004). This view holds that, on the one hand, for women in postcolonial communities the day-to-day exigencies of social violence often calls for practical strategies of resistance aimed at addressing issues of survival, yet on the other hand, as Chandra Mohanty argues, "colonialism almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" that must be addressed at a different level (2003, 51). As feminists, for instance, we have to think about the ways in which "if, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is *even more deeply* in his shadow," sufficient to constitute a layered or doubled—sometimes tripled—oppression (Spivak 1999, 274, my emphasis). In light of this, one response is to hold that

what the subaltern woman needs is a conceptual framework, a language capable of articulating her injuries, needs, and aspirations. The existing discourses or texts of exploitation do not provide such a language: even when they promise explicitly to liberate the subaltern, they obscure the distinctive nature of her oppression; indeed, by purporting to speak for her, they position her as mute. In order to articulate her specific exploitation, the subaltern woman must create her own language (Jaggar, 1998, 6).

Of help here is the distinction drawn by Ofelia Schutte between two kinds of theoretical models in feminist inquiry: participatory and evaluative (1993, 231). For Schutte, participatory models are "those that emphasize the direct and active participation of women in public projects" with the general aim of increasing their ability "to exercise decision-making power about matters that affect their own lives," and which take exclusion to be "a major feature of domination" (ibid). By contrast, evaluative models sketch out a primarily *conceptual* analysis of gender subordination and "can be traced back to a desire for certain theoretical correctness" that ranges from "flexible" to "purist" approaches to women's liberation (231-32). Pluralist evaluative models that *also* incorporate elements of participatory models have been instrumental in addressing complex issues of communicative marginalization in Latin America.

Take the case of Rigoberta Menchú, for example. In 1983 the K'iche' Mayan woman attempted to bring attention to the massacre of over 200,000 Maya Indians at the hands of the Guatemalan Armed Forces by giving a testimonial account of her experiences (*testimonio*) to an ethnologist. David Stoll, an American anthropologist, responded to the subsequent publication of Menchú's oral narrative by questioning the veracity of her claims. Using a model of speech acts based on a correspondence theory of truth, he cast doubt on the legitimacy of her narrative by pointing to apparent contradictions in the names and ages of her deceased family members, including the

manner of death. While Stoll claimed his intent was not to challenge the primacy of larger claims to genocide by the K'iche' community, the debate stirred up enough controversy as to usurp the urgency of Menchú's plea for intervention and instead disseminated her narrative within the broader academic discourses of the 'culture wars' that were emerging in the 1980s.

The evaluative model is important because, if we look to some of the Western conceptual biases inflected into Amerindian cultural traditions through colonialism—as in the assumption that history is a linear narrative based on logographic recording methods (which privilege literacy)— we find that the speaking positions of modern K'iche' are always interwoven, pre-predicatively, with a cultural history marked by relations of power and domination, and which become visible each time the Western observer's claim to finding 'textual distortions' in K'iche' narrative texts arises. However, participatory models are equally important because Menchú is not speaking in a vacuum, but from the concrete historical situation of ethnic genocide and violence against indigenous communities.

There are many factors that can lead to the communicative marginalization of subaltern subjects, or to an erasure of their cultural differences. For instance, one argument commonly emerges which points to pre-Hispanic Mayan codices (hieroglyph scripts) as sharing many of the same conventions typically associated with 'Western' historiography. While recent scholarship suggests Mayan scripts are meant to be sung rather than 'read', by all accounts they seem to enumerate a coherent, meaningful

continuity of politically-significant events, including the successive names of rulers, priestly casts and local rights of administration, etc. In turn, scholars like Stoll have deduced from this Mesoamerican history a more general, cross-cultural standard of rationality assumed to exist *below* the level of culture, and which can be steadfastly applied to the formal study of objects in empirical research, including ethnography. Yet paradoxically, this argument may reinforce the existence of cultural difference, historical injustice and cross-cultural misrecognition in the Latin American context.

We know, for example, that in Mesoamerican K'iche' society there existed an influential priestly scholarly community known as the *aj tz'ibab*. Because the *aj-tz'ibab* sustained Mayan religious practice through the composition and interpretation of calendars, Spanish conquerors quickly moved to eradicate both the religious calendars and their perceived 'authors' (Carmack 1973, 17). The violent extermination of the *aj tz'ibab* are significant to the de-legitimization of Menchú's narrative almost 500 years later, since, as George Lovell and Christopher Lutz point out,

> once the practice of training 'historians' was curtailed—it was a Kaqchikel [Menchú's tribe] custom also, we should note—the loss must have had a serious impact on the accuracy and care with which Maya authors later wrote *títulos*, *memorias*, and *relaciones.* The disappearance of professionals such as the *aj tz'ibab* would surely have affected how Maya oral tradition was passed down through the generations (2001, 171).

Careful not to treat 'history' as a universal category of analysis, Lovell and Lutz are not concerned with the preservation of standards of 'care' and 'accuracy' in historical science, but with the Eurocentric devaluation of proverbial, metaphoric and oral-poetic elements in K'iche' narratives—something they accuse Stoll of doing. On their view, any chance of judging K'iche' narrative practices according to standards similar to those of

Western historical science were eradicated when the *aj tz'ibab* were massacred. Thus, the development of certain oral-poetic, mnemonic features in K'iche' narrative practice after the conquest owes much to the fact that, while Spanish conquerors violently forced a functional change in sign-systems onto Amerindian linguistic communities, they simultaneously *excluded* those communities from practices (such as literacy) that would allow them to engage collectively in the interpretive processes of culture.

This does not mean, however, that the K'iche' do not have a sense of "historical memory," only that the communal narrative which sustains it had to be based—following the conquest—on the mnemonic devices of orality: "factual discrepancies and contradictions, questions of authority and representation, the purposeful act of simplifying, embellishing, improvising," and rhetorical repetition not only underlie Menchú's narrative, but the sixteenth-century *memorias* ('memoirs') sent by K'iche' Indians to King Philip II of Spain as well (186). In light of this example, we see how, when a modern K'iche' goes to speak or make claims on behalf of their community, relations of power and domination already shape their enunciative attempts: their very language and narrative practices are a product of this history of domination.[27]

This problem of the subaltern, postcolonial subject's incapacity to speak in terms unencumbered by a problematic cultural heritage (or histories of domination) allows us to critique contemporary hermeneutics on a number of fronts.

First, the historical tradition that constitutes the hermeneutic web of meanings is largely monolithic, invariably rooted in a framework of Greek, Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment assumptions, and fails to account for the existence of a "plurality of

cultural traditions" in colonial situations (Mignolo 1995, 19). That is to say, for Walter

Mignolo, "colonial situations imply a plurality of traditions (instead of an 'ongoing

natural one') that call for a redefinition of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, and

invite a pluritopic, instead of a monotopic hermeneutics" (ibid). As we'll see shortly, this

latter brand of one-dimensional hermeneutics results in a failure to grasp the extent to

which intercultural communication already entails forms of discursive violence because

the complex and heterogeneous situations of colonial subjects are never addressed.

Second, philosophical hermeneutics as it manifests in the work of Heidegger and

Gadamer is largely concerned with the broad question of how meaning is constituted and

sustained within the horizon of *Western* history. The particular social and political

oppressions that emerge when the Western horizon covers over an indigenous,

Amerindian horizon are overlooked. Thus, philosophical hermeneutics, as Richard

Bernstein notes, fails to offer

> an adequate conceptual understanding of what stands in the way, blocks, and
> distorts authentic cultural understanding in the contemporary world. Gadamer is
> not primarily a social and political thinker. We will not find in his hermeneutics a
> developed notion of how power, force, and violence actually work in
> contemporary societies (1996, 39).[28]

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to explore specific instances of what

'stands in the way, blocks, and distorts' attempts at intercultural dialogue and

understanding by turning to colonial history and the colonization of Amerindian

languages. In so doing, I hope to contribute to this conversation by giving a more robust

account of the complexities involved in speaking through cultural situations colored by

colonial experience, and which bear a strong (yet largely unacknowledged) imprint in the

difficult epistemic labors performed by marginalized postcolonial subjects, and women in

particular, in the course of intercultural dialogue.

II.   Modern Alphabetic Literacy and the Conquest of the Americas

In his acclaimed *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*: *Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (1995), Walter Mignolo gives a detailed account of how European powers conquered vast Amerindian territories through the imposition of foreign categories of knowledge, of which the most important were Western literacy and the alphabetic technologies that supported it. For Mignolo, by colonizing Amerindian languages through a threefold process of alphabetization, orthographic systematization, and translation into European dictionaries, sixteenth-century missionary ethnographers displaced the primacy of speech and orality in Mesoamerican culture. They overlooked the fact that "speech and writing, in Amerindian societies, were not related and were not conceived in the same way that they were in Greece and in the construction of the Western tradition" (2004b, 298). In light of this, the imposition of Greco-Roman alphabetic scripts as the basis for speech communication made it difficult for surviving Amerindians to express, to use one example, *embodied* relations of mutuality and interwoven reciprocity with their life-world, as these relations often had to be performed or sung, and could not be reduced to the conventions of Western scribal technology.

In fact, the Nahua scholar James Lockhart has remarked that the very notion of a 'word' was alien to contact-era Nahuatl speakers, who, when forced to abandon native writing systems for alphabetic writing, "transcribed sound, syllables, and sentences but not words" (Mignolo 2004b, 296). The anthropologist Mark King has reinforced this

point in other Amerindian languages, adding that the calendar day names in Quiché [K'iche'] are untranslatable into Spanish as proper names—that "in actual practice names are 'read' not as words in themselves but as a kind of oral rebus for quite other words," which are in turn linked back to "the *social actions* that characterize them" instead of "a fixed inventory of symbols" that map one-to-one onto an 'objective' world (2004, 113). This kind of cyclical, woven reciprocity between language and the human life world was not only shattered by "the solidification brought about by alphabetic writing'"—insofar as it was "at odds with an autochthonous connectedness to things," (Tomlinson 30) but also showed that "one of the problems for the Western mind is conceiving of tangible and graphic systems of communication that are qualitatively different from alphabetic writing" ["uno de los problemas para la mente occidental es concebir sistemas tangibles y gráficos de communicación cualitativamente diferentes de la escritura alfabética"] (Quispe-Agnoli, 292).

Deeply influenced by Serge Gruzinski's *La Colonizasion de L'imaginaire: Sociétés Indigenes et Occidentalisation dans le Méxique Espagnole, xvème-xviiième Siècles* (1988), Mignolo's analysis represented a significant turn in theoretical approaches to the study of colonized languages in the Americas (Castro-Klaren 1998).[29] Prior to this, the imposition of peninsular Spanish and the suppression of native Amerindian languages were primarily understood through a political paradigm, one rooted in contemporary analyses of medieval political philosophy and the role of language in imperial state-building projects. Consider, for instance, the Bishop of Avila's advice to Queen Isabella, the Spanish Catholic monarch in 1492:

> Soon Your Majesty will have placed her yoke upon many barbarians who speak outlandish tongues. By this, your victory, these people shall stand in a new need:

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the need for the laws the victor owes to the vanquished, and the need for the language we shall bring with us (qtd. in Humphreys, 313).

Language, on this view, was the natural "companion of empire"—to use Antonio Nebrija's famous phrase[30]— because it could unify and impose a certain regulative authority over large groups of people on par with centralized forms of governance or religion. It was a tool to be used like any other, and Spain's political reality in the decades leading up to 1492, the year Spain became a unified state, testified to the success of language polices over large territories. In 1492, Spain's re-conquest (*Reconquista*) of the Iberian peninsula drew to a close with the expulsion of the last of the Arab settlements (dating from 711 AD), and one way to unite the remaining loose federation of states, comprising of Aragonese, Catalan, Leonese, and Basque speakers, was through a common tongue: Castilian (Mar-Molinero 2000, 1-38). The process of 'Castilianization' of peninsular languages was thus bound up with the construction of a national identity for political gain. Given this history, beginning in the nineteenth century, scholarly interest in Amerindian languages revolved around the issue of cultural sovereignty and the recovery of a Pre-Columbian heritage in decolonization efforts.

Mignolo's approach differs from this interpretation of the role of language in colonization insofar as he highlights the *epistemic* consequences of imperial language policies as well as the role of "the theoretical languages of modernity" in shaping the colonial project at large (1995, ix).[31] He draws from a wide variety of sources, most notably cultural anthropology, Latin American social theory, postcolonial historiography, and ancient literary studies, all in an attempt to articulate a framework that can account for interpretive differences covered-over by colonialism. He terms this approach

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"pluritopic hermeneutics". As Ofelia Schutte explains, Mignolo uses this notion

> to analyze the effects of Spanish conquest and colonization in a non-Eurocentric way while also pointing to a blind spot or lapse in colonial thinking…'pluritopic hermeneutics' reverses the established Eurocentric linear thinking with an interpretive counterstance in which concepts of time and space held by various indigenous societies could be cognitively mapped in a type of side-by-side relation to those of the Iberians, rather than subordinating the former to the latter. In this view, the adoption of a pluritopic hermeneutics performs a valuable role in allowing for a decolonization of the interpretive methods by which one may come to understand indigenous thinking and cultural practices (as they would no longer be subsumed by an alien imaginary and symbolic order) (2010, 318).

Although there is some ambiguity in Mignolo's broader theoretical claims, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* makes clear that "the Spaniards erased the differences between the two cultures by using their description of themselves as a universal frame for understanding different cultural traditions," and that a theoretical remedy must be sought (1995, 96). What is not often clear from the beginning, however, is the unique status of European colonialism amongst other forms of cultural imperialism or territorial expansion. That is to say, the question arises as to whether or not this unilateral cultural projection is in fact a general attribute of religious and political expansion projects throughout world history —whether it happens to come at the helm of a Charlemagne, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, or in our case, Hernán Cortéz. How is European colonialism different than, say, the Norman conquest of England? The Norman invasion, after all, resulted in the linguistic imposition of Old Norse and Anglo-French phonetic variants, sufficient to transform Old English into what the medieval scholar Kate Wiles has called "post-conquest English"(2009). Finally, what of well-known cases of cultural imposition *within* Mesoamerica, most notably through the Aztec domination of the region and the imposition of tribute regulations on the Tarascans and Tlaxcalans?

For Gayatri Spivak as for other historiographers of the colonized world, the

difference lies in the starting assumptions European 'conquerors' held about the peoples

and territories they 'discovered' (Said 1994, Bhabha 1994, Ghuha 1988). She calls this

the assumption of "*terra nullis,*" the idea that native inhabitants were like a blank slate

not yet 'inscribed' with a prior background of meaningful cultural norms and practices—

a type of no man's land free for the taking (1999, 212-13). Because the "assumption of an

uninscribed earth that is the condition of possibility of the worlding of a world generates

the force to make the 'native' see himself as 'other'," European colonialism had the

added consequence of alienating Amerindian peoples from their own self-identifications

(or contextual 'worlds') and replacing them with, among other things, a negative

interpretation of themselves under the subordinated side of imperial binaries (as in

master/slave, civilized/uncivilized, Spaniard/Indian, etc.) (ibid).

Under the imperial rubric, Amerindians were seen, at best, as noble savages in the

primitive stages of cultural development (but capable of either quasi or full rationality,

and hence of 'human rights') and at worst, brute savages existing in a state of nature

without meaningful cultural indicators, but with the minimal rationality for

evangelization. The French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc (1707 -1788) expressed the

latter view, which continued well past the eighteenth century, as the notion that "all

natural Americans were, or still are, savages; Mexicans and Peruvians have been so

recently brought under orderly government that they should not be considered an

exception. Whatever the origin of these savage nations is, it must be common to all" (qtd.

in Zavala, 333). This position is not unique to Leclerc, and became particularly

entrenched in Western thought through the Hegelian idea that "universal history goes

from East to West," with Europe as the telos or absolute end of history. Not surprisingly,

in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837), the destruction of Native Amerindian culture is explained in terms of 'natural inferiority'—the idea that "culturally inferior nations such as these are gradually eroded through contact with more advanced nations which have gone through a more intensive cultural development"(164). Like Leclerc, Hegel contends:

> We do have information concerning America and its culture, especially as it had developed in Mexico and Peru, but only to the effect that it was a purely natural culture which had to perish as soon as the spirit approached it. America has always shown itself physically and spiritually impotent, and still shows itself so. For after the Europeans had landed there, the natives were gradually destroyed by the breath of European activity. Even the animals show the same inferiority as the human beings…they are obviously unintelligent individuals with little capacity for education. Their inferiority, in all respects, even in stature, can be seen in every particular (ibid).[32]

The Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel has commented at length on the deep complicity between European modernity and colonization efforts in America and Africa, drawing attention to Hegel's assertion that "Africa…does not properly have a history. For this reason we abandon Africa, we will mention it no more" (1995, 22). The notion that native inhabitants are without a properly recognizable history or meaningful framework of reference can also be seen in the voluminous records of ethnographic correspondences between state emissaries and European monarchs.[33]

Consider the first letter to be sent from Brazil. On May 1, 1500, Pedro Vaz de Caminha, then stationed at Porto Seguro de Vera Cruz in the Andes, sent a letter to King Manuel I of Portugal detailing his impression of native Amerindians. He writes:

> They seem to me people of such innocence that if one could understand them and they us, they would soon be Christians, because *they do not have or understand any belief*…I do not doubt that they will become Christians, in accordance with the pious intent of Your Highness… for it is certain these people are good and of pure simplicity, and *there can easily be stamped upon them whatever belief we wish to give them* (my emphasis).

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European colonization is unique because, by contrast, the violent encounters between

Carthage and Rome, Aztec ritual warfare with Tlaxcalans, the Ottoman incursion into

Byzantium, Mongol control of Eurasia and the Norman conquest of England can all be

situated within a larger framework of pre-conquest cultural contact, whether through

territorial wars, religious excursion, commercial trade, piracy, or migratory settlement.

They were aware of one another's existence, either through first hand encounters or

allusions in epic narratives. Amerindians had no such cultural record of white Europeans.

Although Aztecs and Tlaxcalans (to use one example) may have wished to 'stamp

whatever belief' upon the other, most likely judging one another's interpretive framework

and cultural beliefs as inferior, the assumption never went so far as to hold that the other

had '*no* beliefs' or background framework.

But part of this 'blank slate' assumption, as Angel Rama has argued, also has to

do with providing a requisite justification for imperial settlement in the first place. In *The

Lettered City* (1996) he explores this notion by analyzing the relationship between

Western literacy (as a stratifying, privileged practice) and urban planning/architectural

policies in Colonial America. Rama points out that in an effort to bring to life "the ideal

of the city as the embodiment of social order," native landscapes "were blindly erased by

the Iberian conquerors to create a supposedly 'blank slate' " that could accommodate

their visions of the orderly city; the tool which helped them achieve this was an

administrative bureaucracy ruled by restricted access to the official instruments of

writing. What's more, "this ordering impulse could do relatively little to transform the

old cities of Europe, where the stubbornly material sediments of the past encumbered the

flight of a designer's fancy, but it found a unique opportunity in the virgin territory of an

enormous continent" (1-2).

In either case, this is a uniquely recurrent theme in the colonization of the Americas, and Mignolo's early work on colonial historiography of language brings this problem to the forefront. He finds powerful evidence for this in a 1529 letter addressed to Phillip II, where Fray Pedro de Gante remarked of the difficulty in teaching the gospel to "people without writing, without letters, without written characters and without any kind of enlightenment (era gente sin escriptura, sin letras, sin caracteres y sin lumbre de cosa alguna)" (1989, 66) but also in the common and repeated expression "this language lacks such and such letters (esta lengua carece de tales letras)" found throughout Amerindian grammars and missionary ethnographies, to which we now turn (1995,46).

For European colonizers, "knowledge was the sum of observations classified and categorized through language, a system of referential signs connected by logical operations suited to represent external reality'" that differed significantly from the existing relationship between knowledge, language, and reality in pre-Hispanic America (Zavala 1989, 323). Principles of interwoven reciprocity and embodiment governed the latter, such that, to use Lockhart's example, at the level of spoken language every Nahuatl noun "is at least potentially a complete equative (relational) statement in itself" with an internal subject and verb (2001,11). Assigning a formal grammar to Nahuatl based on the logical operations of Western syntax obscures the fact that "the most basic words are, in Richard Andrew's term, 'sentence-words,'" with predicates already included in every substantive (Tomlinson, 29). For example, the noun *tenepantlamoquetzani* roughly translates as "one who puts himself between those who are

quarreling in order to calm them" (Maffie 2007, 4).[34]

Speakers of Indo-European languages have great difficulty grasping this braided complexity between spoken language and the proximate world. This is largely due to underlying Western assumptions about the nature of the world and the self that are, in turn, encoded in subject-predicate grammar. The most prominent of these assumptions is the subject/object distinction. In Nahuatl, no such distinction holds, and can be seen in the total absence of third-person (singular and plural) subject prefixes and the agglutinating restrictions placed on the first person subject prefix. This means that any reference to an "I" must be compounded with broader concepts with no way of stressing the independence of the singular subject (likewise, there is no differentiation between the nominative case personal pronouns in the second person, as 'you' and 'we' both share the prefix form "ti"). On this account, designating an instrumental relationship between acting subjects and independent objects is very difficult without an independent "it".

Interestingly, whereas third person subject prefixes do not exist in Nahuatl, third person possessive prefixes of nouns appear, but as unstressed parts of nouns. This owes to the conceptual reciprocity between spoken language and the Nahua life-world. That is to say, because 'houses' (as human dwelling places) are inextricably related to the people that inhabit them, there is no way to simply say the noun "house" independently of this social context. Thus, "*calli*" has a third person subject built into it (-*i*) that means "it is a house," or, more precisely, "*that* it is a house" (for him, her, or those who dwell in it), as the translation 'it is a house' places undue emphasis on the noun as an impersonal object. Lastly, because no human stands alone, "Nahuatl has absolutely no way to say 'he' or she'," and remains ambiguous in the third person singular possessive (in both gender and

number) (Lockhart 2007, 1-51). This is reflective of a communitarian ethos where every

being is a relational being already woven into a reciprocal stance with one another, and

where speech communication is more reflective of, what Martin Buber would call, an "I-

thou" rather than an "I-it" relationship (Buber 1923).

Much of the grammatical ambiguity in classical Nahuatl and other contact-era

Amerindian languages can be traced to the fact that reality itself was understood as

"irreducibly ambiguous" (Maffie 2010, 13). European-trained ethnographers and

grammarians, of course, had a radically different background understanding of language

and reality. This difference is evident in Cornelius de Pauw's (1739-1799) oft-cited

Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains (1771), where he observes that "les

langues de l'Amérique sont si bornées, si destitutés de mots, qu'il est imposible de render

par leur moyen un sens métaphysique: il n'y a acune de ces langues dans laquelle on

puisse compter au-delà de trios" (II, 162). Although typical of the time, the rising

primacy of reason and Enlightenment egalitarian ideals began to stir intellectual debates

in Europe surrounding the adequacy of this view. In his *Historia Antigua de Mexico*

(1780), for example, the Jesuit historian Francisco Xavier Clavigero (1731-1787)

responds:

> The languages of America, says M. de Pauw, are so limited, and so scarce in
> words, that it is impossible to express any metaphysical idea in them. In no one of
> those languages can they count above three…M. de Pauw is no less wrong in
> affirming, that the languages of America are so poor, that they cannot express a
> metaphysical idea (an opinion M. de Pauw has learned from M. Condamine).
> Time, says this philosopher treating of the languages of America, duration, space,
> being, substance, matter, body, all these words, and many others, have no
> equivalents to them in their languages; and not only the names of metaphysical
> beings, but also those of moral beings cannot be expressed, unless imperfectly and
> by long circumlocution… it is very true that the Mexicans had no words to
> express such concepts as matter, substance, accident, and the like; but it is equally
> so that no language of Asia, or Europe had such words before the Greeks began to

refine them and abstract their ideas, and to create new terms to express them…(396, translation modified).

By repositioning Europe on a historical continuum tracing back to ancient Greece, and the Greek metaphysical tradition, it would seem Clavigero might move towards a recognition of basic cultural differences between Europe and the Americas, one that is based on regional histories and the contingent philosophical traditions that emerge from them. Instead, the long-standing assumption of an Indigenous *terra nullis* is applied to Amerindian conceptual frameworks in order to superimpose European values and ideas on them. Clavigero does this by pardoning the "ancient Mexicans" for having "no concern with the study of metaphysics," and consequently, for "not having invented words to express those ideas," yet insisting on the natural transferability of metaphysical concepts onto Amerindian languages:

> *We, on the contrary, affirm, that it is not easy to find a language more fit to treat metaphysical subjects than the Mexican:* as it would be difficult to find another which abounds so much as it in abstract terms; for there are few verbs in it from which are not formed verbals corresponding with those in '*-io*' of the Romans; and but few substantive or adjective nouns from which are not formed abstracts expressing the being, or as they say in the schools, the quiddity of things…(397, my emphasis).

Born in Veracruz, Mexico, to a Spanish state emissary and educated in the Mexican provinces of Puebla and Morelos, Clavigero's *Historia* is important on account of the thirty six plus years he spent living in the 'new world' prior to Charles III's expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. Part of his argument against the French naturalists (e.g., Georges-Louis Leclerc, Cornelius de Pauw, Charles-Marie de la Condamine) in fact concerns what he considered to be their mere status as "travelers," foreign visitors without the proper background cultural knowledge for their ethnographic claims (199, 357). In particular, he accuses de Pauw, as representative of these views, of

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misunderstanding the nature of Amerindian *Amoxtli* and *Tacu* (painted codices), which de Paw saw as character-less drawings far inferior to Egyptian hieroglyphic writing (373-74). Differentiating himself from the naturalists, Clavigero notes that "the understanding of those paintings is not difficult to any person who has knowledge of the manner in which the Mexicans usually represented things, the characters which they made use of, and their language; but to M. De Pauw they would be as unintelligible as those of the Chinese expressed in the proper characters of that nation" (401). Clavigero clearly saw himself as well-versed in Amerindian culture, less by formal study than by first-hand, practical experience and immersion in Nahua language. This, then, does not explain why, despite decades of cultural immersion, Clavigero still ascribes European linguistic habits to Nahuatl speakers. He offers the following chart "to the curious among our readers" as absolute nouns "signifying metaphysical and moral ideas, which are understood by the rudest of Indians" (397):

(x) Specimen of words in the Mexican language, signifying moral and metaphysical conceptions.

Tlamantli	King	Nejolnonotzaliztli	Reflexion
Jeliztli	Essence	Tlachtopaittaliztli	Foresight
Qualloti	Goodness	Nejeltnotzonaliztli	Doubt
Neltiliztli	Truth	Tlalnamiquiliztli	Remembrance

Clavigero's semantic equivalencies, along with the parallelism he finds between Nahuatl and Roman verb structures—particularly in light of his first-hand experience with Nahuatl speakers— should make evident the idea that "*the conceptualization* (i.e., the 'meaning network') associated with word[s] and activit[ies] is *culture specific*," in the sense that it requires a series of cultural pre-understandings that illuminate all human practices (be it words, actions, etc.) in specific, meaning-laden ways (Mignolo, 1995,

119). Clavigero's selection of 'essence, goodness, truth, reflection,' but also 'king' as lexical bearers of moral meaning is a strong indicator of this, as it ties him to a Western philosophical tradition where self-conscious reflexivity is a prerequisite for correct judgment (but also for achieving moral goodness), all the while situating him within the broader norms of eighteenth century European political discourses (as in the relation between sovereign/subject and the construction of statehood).

Given the importance of background contexts, the philosopher James Maffie has noted the extent to which contact-era indigenous thought reflected metaphysical and epistemic principles alien to post-Socratic Western thought. He attempts to remedy this situation by giving a detailed account of Pre-Columbian Aztec and Andean thought using a mix of pre-conquest primary sources, archeological remains, and post-conquest ethnohistories. To avoid the trappings of a rational reconstruction of history, Maffie employs a critical methodology for triangulating between these sources, noting the difficulty and limitations involved in such a project (2010, 9). He stops short, however, of an equally ethnocentric bias that claims non-Western peoples cannot have categories of knowledge that bear resemblance to Western philosophy, or that only westerners have asked the question of the meaning of Being (Heidegger 1962). Without claiming philosophical vocabulary as trans-historic, universally valid categories of analysis, Maffie nonetheless asserts "Pre-Columbian societies contained individuals who reflected critically and systematically upon the nature of reality, human existence, knowledge, right conduct, and goodness," and who puzzled over questions such as "how should humans act?" "What can humans know?" and "What can humans hope for?" (2010, ibid).

According to Maffie, Aztec (Nahua) and Inca (Andean) philosophies were guided

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by principles of reciprocity, equilibrium, balance and mutual exchange that presided over a flux-filled universe where humans always hung precariously in the balance. Amerindians saw themselves—to take an image form Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*— as balancing life "on a razor's edge…toiling along a windswept ridge, an abyss on either hand" (Clendinnen 1995, 25). Yet, as Maffie notes, it is this very tension and the oscillating relations of balanced reciprocity surrounding it that make human existence possible in the first place (2010, 11).

Under this account, "*processes* rather than perduring objects or substances are ontologically fundamental. Activity, motion, flux, time, change, and transformation are the principal notions for understanding things" (13, my emphasis). These equilibrating processes, in turn, are guided by a single "dynamic, vivifying, eternally self-generating," animated (yet non-intentional) force which the Aztecs called "*Teotl*" and the Inca, "*Camaquen*" (ibid). *Camaquen* (also called *camac*, *upani*, or *amaya*), like a Spinozistic substance, permeated all aspects of the cosmos and "appears to be coextensive with existence as such" (10). Most significantly, *camaquen* took the form of non-hierarchical, non-exclusionary, reciprocal dualities. For Maffie, these "interdependent, mutually arising, complementary dual forces" can be thought as the binaries of "day/night, sun/moon, above/below, cultivated/uncultivated, insider/outsider, life/death" with the important caveat that one side of the binary is never normatively privileged or overvalued over the other (ibid). These binaries (which significantly, do not include "good/evil") in fact "oppose one another *but never exclude or contradict one another*"— a reciprocal concept that saturated all aspects of Pre-Columbian culture, from double-faced textiles, artifacts, public spaces, ritual, and, as we'll see in a moment, Mesoamerican writing

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technologies.

Like the Andean *camaquen*, for the Nahua, *teotl* is the vivifying element in the cosmos that, "properly understood," is "*neither* being *nor* non-being" but "*becoming*": "*Teotl* neither *is* nor *is not*: Teotl *becomes*" and "is at bottom, ontologically ambiguous" as *unordered* (i.e., it is neither "determined or governed top-down by laws or principles" nor disordered or "chaotic") (13-14). Moreover, just as *camaquen* takes the form of reciprocal dualisms, *teotl* is understood in terms of "the autochthonous Nahua notion of *nepantla*" (ibid). This is a crucially different concept over Western metaphysics.

Nepantla can be broadly conceived as a processive totality that brings balance to all aspects of the cosmos through an act of "middling," a 'thirding' of sorts that places all things "within a 'borderland,' i.e., a dynamic zone of mutual interaction, reciprocal influence, unstable and diffuse identity, and transformation" (14). It cuts across conventional categories and leads to one always being "betwixt and between" categories, as in a ceaseless state of *nepantlatli* (the middled balance between two endpoints, where anything "is neither this nor that, yet both") (16).[35] Lastly, because "human life takes place in [and is of] nepantla," one is always not-yet one, living in a constant rhythmic flow of "change, transition, becoming, and transformation" that requires people "to learn how to change, move, and become in balance" (18). For this reason, Maffie writes, "Nahua wisdom aimed at teaching humans how, like skilled mountain climbers, to maintain their balance upon the narrow, jagged summit of the earth" or how, "like accomplished weavers, to weave together the various forces and tensions in the cosmos and in their lives into a well-balanced fabric" (18-19).

This metaphysical ambiguity helps explain why language, for the Nahua, could

never be a purely referential affair (in the sense of subject-object representational language). To return to Clavigero's "specimen of words," it should be apparent how translating "truth" simply as "Neltiliztli" misses (or in fact, covers-over) the contextual embeddedness of Nahua thought. To clarify,

> Nahua epistemology does not embrace semantic goals such as truth for truth's sake, correct description, or accurate representation. The aim of cognition is walking in balance upon the slippery earth, and epistemologically good (*cualli*) cognition is that which promotes this aim... Nahua philosophy conceives of truth in terms of authenticity, genuineness, and well-rootedness *in* and non-referential disclosing *of* teotl—*not* in terms of correspondence, aboutness, or representation (contra most Western philosophy)…expressing one's understanding of teotl requires a *non-binary mode* of expression, viz. 'flower and song' (Leon-Portilla 1963, 75). Artistic activity generally, but especially *singing and poetry—rather than advancing of discursive arguments*—is the truest most authentic way of expressing one's understanding of teotl. Philosophers are perforce poet-singers and artists who unconceal teotl through metaphorical speech and artistic image. Finally, because teotl is unordered, betwixt-and-between, etc., human beings are unable to fully comprehend teotl (Maffie 2010, 19-20, my emphasis).

Thus, we are now in a position to see how Mesoamerican writing systems, as one aspect of Amerindian languages, reflected key themes in pre-Columbian thought. In stark contrast to chirographic, Western literary practices, Amerindians wrote without words. Instead, they employed nonalphabetic scripts such as the Andean knotted strings called *khipus* (also quipu, or quippus), Mayan hieroglyphs, Aztec codices (narrative pictographs) and book-like *amoxtli* (also *tacu*, or *vuh* for Mayans), and many other forms of textiles, including the woven *tocapu* and wooden *keros*. With the exception of Mayan hieroglyphs, by and large, modern Western linguists do not recognize *khipus*, *codices*, *tacu* and textiles like *tocapu* as real scripts or "true writing," reducing them to simple "*aides-mémoire*" in cultures characterized by "primary orality" (Diringer 1953; Gelb 1963; Ong 1988, 83; Lounsbury 1989, 203). Mayan hieroglyphs, which currently date

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from as far back as the third century B.C., have fared better on account of their logographic qualities; because they are made up of pictorialized logograms (with accompanying sets of phonetic clues in later glyphs), they resembled 'embryonic' attempts at transcribing spoken language into fixed form, and could thus, like Egyptian hieroglyphs, fit into the traditional classificatory schema for the development of Western writing (Houston 2004b, 352).

The idea that Amerindian writing systems were at embryonic or early stages of chirographic development—which, given enough time and favorable conditions— might have blossomed into a robust semiotic system of standardized markings (with a fixed phonetic value and accompanying rule-system for correct combinatorial use) is an occidental prejudice, and a deep one at that.

In *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes* (2004), Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter Mignolo trace this evolutionary model to the privileging of alphabet-based chirographic literacy in post-Homeric Greece and its resurgence in the European Renaissance (228). Boone, in particular, cites Isaac Taylor's 1899's "five-stage sequence for the development of writing, which he explained as progressing from pictures to pictorial symbols, verbal signs, syllabic signs, and ultimately alphabetic signs" (6). Out of this modern historical matrix, a conception of 'true writing' arose that, by definition, excluded systems other than syllabic and alphabetic writing. Offering a critique of such a model is especially germane to discussions on colonialism given that, in the sixteenth century, even humanist 'defenders' of Amerindian's rights held that "barbarians are those who lack a literary language (*qui*

literali sermone carent) which corresponds to their mutual idiomatic language, as is Latin to us, and thus do not know how to express what they think" (Mignolo, 78, citing Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484-1566)). Mignolo hence takes issue with David Diringer's (1962) influential definition of writing as more than any semiotic mark with culturally-situated meaning (in the hermeneutic sense); "pure" writing, on Diringer's view, arose when, *along with* the semiotic mark or practice, "a coded system of visible marks was invented whereby a writer could determine the exact words that the reader would generate from the text" in an objective fashion (229). We see this still today, for example, in the notion that "textile specialists continue their quest for a Rosetta stone leading to the decoding of Inca information in woven *tocapu* according to the rules of Inca logic," including the use of complex *mathematical algorithms* (even game theory) for breaking the 'code' behind the recurring, dualistic patterns in Andean textiles (Heckman 2004, 52). The point Mignolo tries to make throughout the course of his writings on Amerindian languages, and which at times can be difficult to discern, is that the 'code' is culture itself—i.e., it is not learned but *inhabited*— and that at the time of the conquest, Spaniards rooted in their own codes failed to see that a fully fleshed-out, intricate code "co-existed" in the Americas prior to European 'discovery' of the New World:

> The missionaries believed that Amerindians did not have a language sufficient to explain the mysteries of the Holy Catholic Faith, but the missionaries did not consider the possibility that their own language was equally insufficient to account for Amerindian matters, among them the Amerindian uses and conceptualization of painting, carving, and weaving (e.g. writing) and the role that these played in society (2004a, 225).

They were, in other words, 'mono'-topical as opposed to 'pluri'-topical in their thinking. In addition, Mignolo also wants to say that there are some codes that, because

of their history, notions of language, reality, the self, etc., lend themselves to this kind of

perspectival attitude, but that this is something that must itself be pointed out (as the

monolithic process of colonization can obscure the complexities of our hermeneutic

situation). Trying to decipher a *tocapu*, or other Andean textiles according to a set of

'rules' in 'Inca logic', on this view, is something that interpreters shaped by Western,

modern-European frameworks are apt to do. In the last page of Martin de Murúa's

Historia General del Perú (c.1590), we find such an attempt to provide a background

'code' or Rosetta stone for the decipherment of Amerindian textiles and weaving

patterns, with alphabetic technologies as a model.

However, there is very little reason to think Amerindian writing systems would

have ever developed into an alphabetic script, as all the other parts of the 'web' that held

those systems in a particular kind of intelligibility supported metaphysical and epistemic

principles of deep, *embodied* reciprocity and ambiguity alien to post-Socratic thought,

and the disambiguating, alphabetic technologies that accompanied it. For instance, take

the practice of narrative pictography, as seen in Nahua *tacu* (also *amoxtli*). These were

accordion-like sheets of folded bark or deer skin on which paintings conveying a story

were recorded using (mostly) red and black ink drawn from plants and flowers. *Tacu* can

be rendered (roughly, of course) as 'the act of painting' or 'design-making', yet it also

had a second, equally important sense of attentive *listening*, (or *that* one listens) (King,

2004, 105,127). This draws us to the reciprocal binary of giving/receiving that the

practice of *tacu*, as a nepantla process, brought into balance. To write is to 'rob flowers of

their color,' and so to maintain balance one must reciprocate by listening to 'the skin of

the earth,' which, because it is always transient, changing and in flux, can only be (at most, dimly) conveyed by humans through the *polysemous* nature of *song*. This is why written Amerindian scripts, "as part of the earth," had to be sung and performed out loud (107).

We know, by contrast, that the practice of silent reading, as a process of individual interiorization, was a late byproduct of Western modern alphabetic literacy (Havelock 1963, Ong 1982). However, as Stephen Houston argues, the Pre-Columbian practice of oral performances of written scripts (often called "recitation literacy") has, to date, been narrowly understood by Western scholars as a simple consequence of orality, and the burdens of memorization oral mnemonics (like repetition, rhythm, meter, cadence, improvisation and bodily emphasis) helped relieve (2004a, 30-31): It is a "cognitive consequence" of the script technologies surrounding different stages of writing. For Houston, this is misleading; the constant comparisons with Classical Greece have made it difficult to see how Amerindian literacies were primarily "a product of historical and social processes" that were "not intrinsic to the script itself" (33). The idea that, contra Western epistemology, truth had to be *sung*, does not then come as a result of the oral technologies involved in certain types of Mesoamerican scripts, but from the intricate backdrop of a socio-historical life-world that gave rise to them. This helps explain why *tacu,* as a nepantla process, can encompass a range of meanings associated with writing, paining, listening, knowing, singing, but also *life* in general—that one is "alive" (King, 127). The purpose of Mesoamerican writing was hence not to 'fix' the meaning of words through semiotic marks, but to express the various elements of Aztec

or Inca culture in a way harmonious with their background assumptions.

Maffie's background context for Pre-Columbian thought helps us recognize how painting, as a Mesoamerican script, *was no different from weaving* or knot-tying in quippus, or other texile-based scripts that told narratives without an established independent code—and that, in fact, to read these writings aloud, one had to *already know* the story in the first place. Western literacy, on the other hand, presupposes that a reader, at the start of a sentence, has no knowledge of its contents, with the book, *rather than the person*, being the site of knowledge and authority (Mignolo 1995).

But there is still more. In "The Text in the Body, the Body in the Text: the Embodied Signs of Mixtec Writing," John Monaghan confronts the question of embodiment that Western literacy often neglects, and which is particularly important for understanding the more pernicious aspects of the colonization of Amerindian languages. Typically, the embodied relation between literacy and the body is taken to mean that "texts, when performed, were given voice through the entire body: through choreography, through hand gestures, through spacing, and through the clothing worn, as well as through verbal utterances" (2004, 91). Monaghan also suggests a deeper sense of embodiment in Mesoamerican scripts. Native Amerindians such as Mixtecs, he writes,

> use corporeal processes, the functions of organs, and bodily products *as models* for other processes, functions, and products [like weaving or painting]. Thus, when producing a history, or a description of a ritual, or an account of how settlements may be related to one another, the Mixtec scribe was likely to focus on how the event, or practice, or relationship could be expressed in terms of the body…the linguistic basis of the sign and the corporeal basis for the sign interpenetrate to such an extent that they cannot be separated from one another (95-96).

By using indigenous metonymies and homologies "between the body and the

world," Mesoamerican scripts had an incarnate, bodily element that, once gained,

maintained a balanced network of reciprocity. All of this changed with the introduction of

the Latin alphabet. According to Mignolo, "one of the features of alphabetic writing—

which we can guess was one taken for granted by Castilian men of letters—is that it

permits us to communicate at a distance and to detach the 'letter' (as image of the sound)

from the body" as an equal contributor to the interpretation of meaning (Mignolo 1989,

56). An alphabet (from the Greek letters *alpha, beta*, derived from Semitic *aleph*, *beth*)

can be understood as an organized, fixed system of signs "expressing the basic sounds of

the language, through which it is possible to record in writing whatever the user wishes to

express" (Ouaknin 1999, 19). To quote the Spanish renaissance humanist Antonio

Nebrija (1441-1522), "the letter is nothing more than a trace or figure by means of which

the voice is represented" in a precise, objective fashion devoid of background contexts or

latticed associations between body, language, culture and the voice (as qtd. in Mignolo

1995, 42).

The most important record we have today concerning the alphabetization of

Amerindian languages is Fray Diego de Landa's (1524-1579) *Relación de las Cosas de*

Yucatán (1566), wherein Landa transcodes isolated Mayan glyphs into letters in the Latin

alphabet, with the appending remark:

> These people made use of certain characters or letters, with which they wrote in
> their books their ancient matters and their sciences, and by these and by drawings
> and by certain signs in these drawings, they understood their affairs and made
> others understand them and taught them. We found a large number of books in
> these characters and, as they contained nothing in which there were not to be seen
> superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which they regretted to an
> amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction. Of their letters I will
> give here an A,B,C, since their ponderousness does not allow anything more…

(169).

Landa's assumption that Mayan hieroglyphs had equivalences in the Roman alphabet (at least for A, B,C) was taken up by the Franciscan Diego Valdéz (1533-1589) in his monumental *Rhetorica Christiana* (1579), which served as a teaching tool for Friars teaching Nahua speakers their own language in Romanized form. But it was not enough to teach natives individual letters, for they might employ indigenous principles and habits to combine them in particular ways the Friars could not control. There needed to be an orthography to set out formal rules of usage, and to ensure Amerindians 'spoke as they wrote, and wrote as they spoke' (Nebrija 1517). These grammar books—which included the Jesuit Horacio Carochi's *Arte de la Lengua Mexicana* (1645), Fray Alonso de Molina's *Vocabulario en Lengua Castellana y Mexicana* (1571), and Fray Domingo de Santo Tomás *Grammatica o Arte de la Lengua General de los Indios de los Reynos del Peru* (1560)— were among the first books to be printed in the New World. Their orthographic rules introduced subject-predicate grammar, the use of punctuation, word spacing, all in the linear conventions of Western literary practices, with economies of writing suited to fit the European page rather than deerskin, yarn, bark, or wood.

In later stages, the sedimentation of modern alphabetic literacy also became a fulcrum around which the history of ideas could be implanted in the New World, from Renaissance humanist thought to the premises of the European enlightenment. For instance, the philologist and statesman Andrés Bello (1781-1865) (who, incidentally, guided Alexander Von Humboldt during his expedition to Latin America), produced a sweeping orthography of the Spanish language in order to "make writing a faithful and

dependable expression of laws, arts, and sciences, and of everything discussed by wise and learned men in all professions" (1823, 61). His goal, in keeping with the ethos of nineteenth-century European political thought, was "to spread enlightenment in America," as this was "the only way to establish rational freedom, and with the advantages of civic culture and public prosperity" (71).

III.   The Impact of Colonized Languages: Cultural Alterity and Liminality

One of the greatest impacts of the colonization of Amerindian languages has been the closing off of discursive alternatives in culture, as well as the inability to give voice to contradictory experiences resulting from the loss of prior cultural contexts. In the twentieth century, postcolonial and U.S. third-world women (i.e., postcolonial women situated in North America, particularly in North-South borderland regions) began attempting to describe this difficult experience of being multicultural in a social context where, due to European colonization, certain aspects of one's identity were seen as inferior in relation to Anglo-European cultural norms (Anzaldúa 1987, Sandoval 2000). This hybrid, postcolonial self had the added burden of reconciling these different strands of one's identity at the same time she negotiated the various norms and standards from her different cultural backgrounds:

> Alienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits (Anzaldúa 1987, 42).

This experience of being caught "between worlds" while having to address the

multiple oppressions that affect one's life has been brought to the forefront by Latina

philosophers like Mariana Ortega, who see a need to better articulate the complex

experiences of the multicultural self. "For other multiplicitous selves like me," writes

Ortega, "it is liminality, oppression, colonization, erasure, a mix of all these" that bear a

powerful (yet usually unacknowledged) imprint on the lives we live as postcolonial

women of color (2008, 236). Following the "phenomenological insight" that our

theoretical frameworks and epistemologies ought to "do justice to our lived experience,"

Ortega calls attention to blind spots in traditional hermeneutical conceptions of selfhood

that posit a predominantly stable narrative self-identity (ibid). For Ortega, such accounts

fail to do justice to the narrative life of multicultural and subaltern subjects because, as

she explains,

> one of the main sources of anguish for this multicultural self is precisely that,
> unlike Heidegger's *Dasein*, it does not have a sense of all the norms and practices
> of the new context which it now inhabits. Thus it does not relate to the world
> primarily in terms of know-how, [as] Heidegger claims that we do (2001, 9).

The point Ortega wants to make is that postcolonial subjects dwell in an

understanding of things marked, not by continuity, but by discontinuity, rupture, and

alterity. This is because postcolonial subjects "continually live these experiences of

uneasiness, even while performing practices that for the dominant group are for the most

part customary and readily available, or what Heidegger calls 'ready-to-hand' " (10, my

emphasis). Ortega uses the example of ordinary practices like eating to show how easily

the hermeneutic notion of pre-reflective understanding breaks down for postcolonial

subjects, adding that what is at stake in her analysis is something far more important than

deciding which utensils to use for meals (or whether to use them at all). In this regard,

Ortega is concerned with "experiences that deal with more important, agonizing, cultural

norms" such as norms "related to our bodies, our sexuality, our educational possibilities, our relationships with others, etc." (ibid). Along this same point, understanding how the colonization of Amerindian languages forcibly *covered-over* a range of interpretive possibilities in culture can have a therapeutic element for postcolonial subjects feeling voiceless or dislocated from the burden of inhabiting multiple cultural contexts.

Take the experience of gender, for example. In *Ancient Maya Gender Identity and Relations*, Karen Bassie-Sweet describes how, "in the male/female principle, a human being was considered to be both male and female, with the right side of the body male and the left side female"—a concept that can be found throughout Mesoamerica and in Uto-Aztecan cultures like the Hopi Indians (2002, 169). This is continuous with Maffie's earlier description of balanced oppositions and reciprocal dualisms in Pre-Columbian thought. Now, consider Anzaldúa's assertion that "what we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other," either male or female but not both (1987, 41). As a chicana (Mexican-American) lesbian woman growing up at the Texas-Mexico border, Anzaldúa suffered deep prejudices and alienation form her own community on account of her sexuality. "The people of Hargill, in south Texas," she writes, "believed that if you were a lesbian, you were a woman for six months of the year and had periods, and for the other six months, you were a man and had a penis" (2009, 90). It would seem to be the case that, given the apparent continuation and resilience of (at least some aspects of) the male/female principle, so-called "half and halfs" would not be normatively devalued to the extent that Anzaldúa recounts. But when we recall that European colonialism imported a system of

exclusionary logic (which would include the laws of identity and non-contradiction) that was reinforced through, among other things, gendered articles (in Spanish) and subject-predicate grammar, we see that for beings caught "between and betwixt" these categories, the resources of expression necessary to describe and do justice to such experience are no longer at one's disposal. Instead, due to the logical rules built into the language we use to describe experience, what falls outside these categories or cannot be assimilated through them becomes devalued as Other, as outside the norm. Thus, we see here a vivid example of the internal clashes, the "choque" Anzaldúa talks about when referring to the multiple, but *asymentrical* contexts of reference postcolonials must inhabit, and which often lead to experiences of being "an outsider" at multiple levels—of being "always the outside of the outside of the outside" (2009, 90).

From a feminist perspective, there are at least three important consequences of the colonization of Amerindian languages. First, it closed off avenues for thinking openly and easily about the self as a "relational being" (Held 1990, 724) that is already embedded in a network of woven reciprocities and concrete relations with others, and where one of these relations includes the reciprocity with one's own body as a source of moral insight. Second, the colonization of native resources of expression obfuscated the ways in which Pre-Columbian thought made room for ambiguity and ambivalence, both with respect to reality and identity. (Again, with respect to gender, one did not have to fall neatly into either the category of male or female.) Third, feminism's concern with power inequities alerts us to the fact that modern alphabetic literacy in the Americas disenfranchised women by socially legitimating certain knowledges over others—as "the

alphabetic system was the one employed by the colonial administration in all of its transactions" (Mignolo 2004b, 299)—and by restricting women's early access to literacy.

From this last point, we see there is an important social and political dimension that coincides with the linguistic silencing brought on by alphabetization. Amerindians had to be taught back *their own language* after it had been transcoded to the Latin alphabet, creating a rift between new categories of 'literate' and 'illiterate' Indians. Modern alphabetic literacy, after all, was also a prerequisite for citizenship in the constitutions of early Latin American states (Mar-Molinero 2000, 33).[36]

Finally, all three of these concerns unite in discussing post-conquest intercultural dialogue. Taken together, these histories have led to a situation where modern Amerindians always inhabit a pre-predicative space of, what I call, "discursive liminality" with respect to dominant cultures, and where the shared discursive acts and practices underlying meaningful communication are themselves rooted in contexts of oppression. The quickness with which alphabetic, Romanized Nahuatl took root among some Amerindians is an important clue in this direction. Leon-Portilla estimates that by 1528, less than a decade after Cortez's arrival, "we can feel confident that there certainly could have been Nahuas capable of writing their language in Latin script," and that within thirty-five years from the conquest, many became particularly adept in order "to protect their privileges and advocate for their interests" (1962, xvi-xx).[37] And yet, it is important to stress that the few Amerindians that became adept at using alphabetic Nahuatl were almost all male, as colonialism imposed a new system of gender binaries and restrictions that differ significantly form Pre-Columbian conceptions of gender (Lugones 2007). Moreover, becoming 'adept' did not mean simply *growing into an*

understanding of those practices, of dwelling meaningfully in a way that allows one to make sense of things in one's world. For many contact-era and modern Amerindians, to use one example, becoming adept at Spanish was akin to becoming adept at Latin prayers: "It's something we do, not because we understand it, but because that's the way it has to be" Menchú explains, "so although it's something we say and express…we don't always understand what it means" (1984, 81). This should remind us of the eighteenth-century collective native testimonies declaring that "in order for the [Spaniards] not to kill us…we have to accept to have water poured on our heads, that we worship the new god, [and that we] declare he is the same as the one we had" (Leon-Portilla, 161).

In light of this analysis, we ought to gather a deeper sense of the complicated factors involved in North-South dialogue, including an awareness of the difficult epistemic and interpretive labors marginalized postcolonial subjects must often perform without any reciprocal acknowledgment of those efforts. We can now begin to engage these epistemic and interpretive difficulties more rigorously. We will do this in the next chapter by looking at the account of language offered by poststructuralist philosopher Julia Kristeva. I want to suggest that Kristeva's thought is important not only because it resonates to the postcolonial conception of selfhood that is always fragmented and multiplicitous (as in the "stranger within" [1999]), but because it is also attentive to the experience of discursive ruptures and breakdowns of meaning that play such a crucial role in postcolonial life and are, as I have argued, often neglected in the hermeneutic account of language.

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CHAPTER THREE:

Theories of Polyphonic Signification: Kristeva, Bakhtin and Beyond

> If the overly constraining and reductive meaning of a language made up of universals causes us to suffer, the call of the unnamable, on the contrary, issuing from those borders where signification vanishes, hurls us into the void of a psychosis that appears henceforth as the solidary reverse of our universe saturated with interpretation, faith, or truth. I attempt [to] shed light on a number of borderline-practices of meaning and signification …[that] scrutinize the most subtle, the most deeply buried logic of those unities and ultimate relations that weave an identity for the subject, or sign, or sentence.
>
> —Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, preface, x

In this chapter, I offer an account of Julia Kristeva's early work on language as an important alternative to the hermeneutic model, drawing on both its strengths and limitations for application in postcolonial, North-South contexts. This suggestion is based on intuitions about the problematic dialectical role of "otherness" [*Andersseins*] in hermeneutical self-understanding, whether as a culturally differentiated individual 'other' or epistemically as "the strange (*atopon*)" (Gadamer 1976, 32). While philosophical hermeneutics, as we saw in chapter one, places the emphasis on how everyday understanding is made possible through a continuity of meaning—often by bridging differences or coming to some shared agreement through a 'fusion' of interpretive horizons—Kristeva's work places the emphasis instead on how the smooth continuity of meaning frequently lapses, ruptures, or is breached by pre-predicative bodily drives and

desires. Thus, while the hermeneutic model is enormously important for problematizing restrictive notions of linguistic practice prevalent in the colonization of Amerindian languages—notions which the hermeneutic or 'expressivist' view of language seems to better accommodate than 'designative' views—Kristeva's model is more pertinent for talking about issues of complex communication and the fragmentary, disunifying experiences that frequently befall postcolonial subjects, and which Mariana Ortega has artfully described as resulting in a type of hybrid, "multiplicitous subjectivity" (2008b, 65).

To this end, after drawing important (but often neglected) parallels between Kristeva's work and that of the Russian post-formalist thinker, Mikhail Bakhtin, I expand on Kristeva's polyphonic view of human signification as it appears in her seminal *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Lastly, in carefully situating her work historically through the paradigms of Eastern-European and French intellectual history—including her own formative experiences in Bulgaria— I suggest that, while Kristeva's linguistic theories are helpful in rehabilitating static notions of language and subjectivity in structural linguistics and psychoanalytic discourse theory, they are still too indebted to Western developmental and linguistic frameworks and thus not well suited for addressing questions of communicative rupture and marginalization that arise out of the particularity of the Latin American experience with European colonization.

I. The Particularity of Language in Postcolonial Latin America

To begin, as we saw in chapter two, in Latin America the philosophical problem

of language and its capacity to describe experience emerges in ways different from the global North due to the impact of colonialism on Amerindian conceptual frameworks and linguistic systems. This is due to the fact that both experience and the means with which to describe it have been reconfigured on the basis of, what I call, a "re-grammaticalization" of experience that is already steeped in the discursive patterns of modern European and imperial history. On this view, it was not language itself (understood hermeneutically) but rather the underlying *rationale* and Occidental prejudices towards language— the view that language, as we saw in preceding chapters, is an impartial, representational system bound by rules of subject-predicate grammar— that supported the imperial project's objectifying ideology towards the other as a 'thing' or 'native' to be studied, manipulated, or possessed; in Aimé Césaire's terms, "colonization = thingification" (1972, 42).

This particular pre-understanding of language, however, was itself not arbitrary or unique to the momentous political developments taking shape in fourteenth and fifteenth century Spain. Rather, it unfolded over the course of almost two millennia of Greco-Roman, European social acts and practices originating in Athens in the fifth century B.C., and which over time, formed the basis of particular ways of seeing the world, of making sense of experience through a collaborative network of metaphysical assumptions and conceptual biases. These biases— which include subject-predicate language, Western models of human agency (as atomistic individualism), a linear conception of time (*chronos*), an understanding of narrative life based on self-reflexive introspection, Gregorian calendrics (which eliminate the night sky as a reference point), non-reciprocal

hierarchical binaries, and instrumental forms of rationality, to name just a few—did more than simply cover over the interpretive traditions of Mesoamerican communities. Indeed, if, following the hermeneutic tradition, we understand language as the background set of shared cultural assumptions that make meaning possible to begin with, we see that by violently forcing beings into a shared linguistic situation that is not theirs, colonialism created a powerful rift between Amerindian lived experience and the adequacy of a newly imported Western language to describe such experience.

The word 'rift' has some important consequences here, as it suggests the perseverance of some aspect of pre-conquest, Amerindian culture, against which the values and norms of Occidental culture cause what Gloria Anzaldúa aptly calls "un choque," a cultural collision or clash. This rift owes much to the fact that modern Latin American inhabitants did not simply 'grow into' what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "effective history" [*Wirkungsgeschichte*], the meaningful texts and social narratives that constitute their historical lives. In Latin America, these narratives were inscribed by force. This was done, to use one example, through the active colonization of the workday. By imposing such things as the regulatory mechanisms of Western time, market-driven standards of productivity, pastoral herding practices, gendered labor norms, and the instrumental relation between nature and man, colonial discourse forcefully 'worlded-over' the indigenous context…and yet, paradoxically, it was this very use of force that made it possible for residual traces of Amerindian culture to persist. As Gayatri Spivak has argued in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), since this grafting of foreign practices took place on soil historically cultivated for other practices,

other harvests, it resisted the new crop; planting on "resistant ground" thus became the ontological basis for the preservation of cultural practices rather than their total extinction. Although Spivak does not expand on this, the underlying assumption is that the role of violence in the development of historical traditions is a game changer, because it fundamentally affects the very ability of those traditions to sediment themselves and settle into the kind of familiarity necessary to operate *as* 'effective history'.

In a broader context, historical examples like these help to explain why Spivak proposes a continued "commitment not only to narrative and counternarrative" against imperial history, "but also to *the rendering (im)possible of (another) narrative*" in the form of forcibly foreclosed cultural possibilities (1999, 6, my emphasis). The tendency to see speech acts as graphematic, for example, foreclosed the articulative range and potential of the Andean quippus, the Navajo blanket, as well the narrative mode of performance-based history, as in the Sinaloan *Danza del Venado*.[38] In our case, the fact that colonial orthography did not mark tone, breath, or even nasalization of spoken Nahuatl— forcibly recoding the highly polymorphous phonology through the single, fixed phonetic meanings assigned to each letter of the Roman alphabet—shows how western conceptual biases supported the imperial project in the Americas through restrictive notions of linguistic practice.

Due to their rootedness in Greco-Roman semiotic and graphic traditions, the modern Western pre-understandings of language could not accommodate the polysemous nature of Mixtec lexical structure nor the related cultural understanding of speech

communication as a nepantla process—one that, as Maffie explains, "places all things within a borderland, a dynamic zone of mutual interaction" and which conceives of the speaking subject as a complex, heterogeneous process that is always flexive and precariously positioned (Maffie 2010, 9). On this view, by displacing the primacy of speech, orality, and non-binary modes of expression in Mesoamerican culture, the *cultural concealment of speech communication as a nepantla process* had a profound and lasting impact for modern Amerindians. In particular, one place this impact emerges is in a sense of 'inarticulacy' or diminished verbal competency postcolonial people may experience in communicative exchanges with members of dominant cutlures.

For these reasons, in the preceding chapters, I have tried to make evident the claim that speech is always more than speech acts, particularly in the context of Amerindian languages. The hermeneutic/expressivist view of language outlined in chapter one helps us see that there are many ways of speaking, of making manifest or fitting together the range of meanings made possible by the socio-historical communities we grow into. As individuals, we rely on the continuity of those communities to sustain the meaning of what we say, not only through words (as the speech-communicative paradigm is only one facet of language) but also through our moods, bodily gestures, rituals, caring practices and art, to give only a few examples. During times of great loss and distress, where words falter and the insufficiency of one resource of expression may give way to the creative employment of another, the heterogeneous, fluid, and dynamic nature of culture often provides apertures for alternative avenues of 'expression'—of 'giving voice' in particular ways. And yet, as we saw in chapter two, that creative range

of possibilities— *how* one gathers together the pieces of the social fabric we come to know through practical life in unique ways, but which provides the requisite framework for sharing with others the complex dimensions of individual experience—was curtailed by European colonialism, but in a way that has lost transparency today.

Because the expressivist view of language allowed us to speak of human practices like weaving, braiding, painting, even silence as language, it provided us with a way to expose the limitations of representational/designative language. This is important because, as Walter Mignolo suggests, "even today we hold some of the beliefs about the nature of language and its function in society which were held by the men of letters in charge of either educating the natives or justifying the education of the natives" (1989, 54). The hermeneutic view of language outlined by Taylor and Gadamer was helpful in this regard.

However, as Gadamer himself argues, "hermeneutics is primarily of use where making clear to others and making clear to oneself has become blocked" (1976, 92). The emphasis is overcoming differences rather than theorizing the complexity of the factors that lead to such differences. He continues by saying:

> One of the fundamental structures of all speaking is that we are guided by preconceptions and anticipations in our talking in such a way that these continually remain hidden and that *it takes a disruption in oneself* of the intended meaning of what one is saying to become conscious of these prejudices as such. In general the disruption comes about through some new experience, in which a previous opinion reveals itself to be untenable" (ibid).

On my account, one of the reasons 'the other' is so important in the themes discussed in Gadamer and Taylor's work is that it performs a crucial function in hermeneutical *self*-understanding. In Taylor's terms, "other-understanding changes self-

understanding" (1994, 67). It displaces the anticipation of meaning generated by the background understanding of what Taylor calls "our home culture" (1994, 39), and so prevents the sedimentation of meaning in particular historical traditions. Georgia Warnke cites this concept positively, quoting MacIntyre's assertion that "the resources provided by some quite alien tradition" are the perhaps "the only resources" that "will enable us to understand the limitations of our own tradition" (1987, 173). The *atopon* (ἄ τοπον), the strange, has a paradoxically instrumental role in hermeneutical self-understanding. No where is this more evident than in Gadamer's claim that "the mere presence of the other before whom we stand helps *us* to break up our own bias and narrowness *even before he opens his mouth* to make a reply" (1986, 383, my emphasis).

For hermeneutics, the dialogic relationship between the self and other is one that takes the model of a *conversation* with independent conversational partners, one where each may be positioned in very different cultural frameworks and where the goal is coming to an understanding, despite the Other's possible radical alterity, through some type of shared agreement. By contrast, for Kristeva, alterity is already *within* the subject. A plural or multiplicitous self-understanding can be achieved by acknowledging the stranger within all of us.

According to Kristeva, "the methods of classical thought [i.e., philosophy] privilege in signifying practice the moment of stability, and not of crisis" (1977, 519). ["Les méthodes de pensée classique privilégient dans les pratiques signifiantes le moment de stabilité, et non de crise"]. She finds this emphasis objectionable, and instead

characterizes her intellectual project in the following way:

> I shall therefore and in conclusion argue in favor of an analytical theory of signifying systems and practices that would search within the signifying phenomenon for the *crisis* of the *unsettling process* of meaning and subject rather than for the coherence or identity of either *one* or a *multiplicity* of structures (1980, 125).

Before engaging the particularities of her work, however, it is helpful to situate it in the context of historical influences and traditions.

II.   Kristeva's Background and Intellectual Influences

Julia Kristeva was born in the southeastern province of Silven, Bulgaria on June 24, 1941 to Eastern Orthodox parents, Stoyan and Christine Kristev. Her upbringing coincided with tremendous historical shifts and geopolitical realignments in Eastern Europe. At the time of her birth, for example, the region was already mired in conflict: only three months earlier, in March 1941, still reeling from significant losses in the Balkan wars, Bulgaria aligned with Axis powers in an attempt to forgo invasion, realigning with Allied nations only at the very end of WWII. Although the move saved almost the entirety of Bulgaria's Jewish population from encampment, it also created internal rifts in the ruling elite and paved the way for the September 1946 coup d'état that ousted the Tsarist monarchy and replaced it with communist rule (Crampton 1987, 2005). The educational milieu into which Kristeva entered was thus very different from that of her father, who, as a devout Christian (and church accountant by trade), wished to see his daughters brought up in an educational context favorable to old-world Latin, francophone, and byzantine intellectual traditions more at home with the culture of the

former Kingdom of Bulgaria than with the new People's Republic of Bulgaria. In a

speech given in commemoration of her promotion to "Grand Chancelier" status in the

prestigious *légion d'honneur* society (originally inducted in 1997), Kristeva reflects:

> Je pense en effet à mon père, Stoyan Kristev, ce lettré orthodoxe qui poussa le byzantinisme jusqu'à me faire apprendre le français dès mon plus jeune age, en m'inscrivant à l'école maternelle des religieuses françaises, afin de me transmettre l'esprit de doute et de liberté dont se glorifie avec raison la culture française (2008).

> [Indeed I think of my father, Stoyan Kristev, this orthodox intellectual who encouraged Byzantism to the extent of making me learn French from a very early age, enrolling me in a French religious primary school, through which I was transmitted the spirit of doubt and liberty which French culture justifiably glories.] (my translation)

This background is important for establishing some of Kristeva's earliest

intellectual encounters, both in terms of sources and the context in which she might have

possibly received them. Although Stoyan sent Kristeva and her sister to a school run by

French-speaking Dominican nuns since kindergarten, they did not escape the new

education policies characteristic of Eastern Bloc countries. In *The Social Education of*

Bulgarian Youth, educational historian John Georgeoff lays out many of these curricular,

administrative, and institutional changes in Bulgarian education policies, the most

important of which, for our purposes, is the constitutional decree specifying "the schools

are state schools. The establishment of private schools may be allowed only by a special

law, in which case the school in question is under state supervision" (1978,18). This

meant that, while she may have gained important exposure to French texts and culture,

Kristeva's early education prior to her departure to Paris in December 1965 fell under the

domain of compulsory state curriculum requirements. Following Georgeoff, literature

requirements in secondary and post-secondary education during these years called for the

explicit teaching of Russian texts that, while they were not specifically required to advance realism (compatible with Marxist-Leninist materialism), at minimum did not promote idealism (89-90). It is therefore highly likely in my view that Kristeva read the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) at this stage and was not, as some scholars have suggested, later introduced to Bakhtin by her fellow Bulgarian, Tzvetan Todorov.[39]

Unlike many of the Russian Formalists, Bakhtin's continued and overt emphasis on the social and historical dimension of speech communication seems to fit the bill for curricular requirements. On closer inspection, however, Bakhtin's anti-monolithic, pluralistic view of human communication and language were tacitly nestled underneath a cobbled network of difficult terms and concepts: heteroglossia, dialogism, carnival, polyphony, and glossia— a practice which Bakhtin perhaps developed as a result of his exilic experience in Kazakhstan, precariously shifting publication conditions, and to further avoid the Stalinist purges of intellectuals in Russia that ultimately claimed the lives of many of his acquaintances (Holquist 1990, Vice 1997).

Despite the difficult prose, young intellectuals like Kristeva already keen to anti-hegemonic sentiment (and who were talented enough to read into the complexity of his assertions) were likely moved by the liberatory and transgressive undertones of Bakhtin's texts. We find evidence for such a sentiment in Kristeva's early works like *Revolution in Poetic Language* as well as in the many interviews she has given over the years. In a 1992 interview for the French publication *Nouvel Observateur*, for example, she tells the story of early pressures on family life (especially for her Orthodox father) under the dogmatism of Soviet cultural policy, recounting the times she was forced to slip out of

the house "before dawn so that I could take communion without being spotted." Although Kristeva later goes on to reject the universal discourses of religion as 'ideology', adding that "poetic language…questions the very principle of the ideological [and] prevents its theologization" into sectarian forms (1984, 61), early experiences such as these most likely allowed Bakhtin's works to resonate at a much deeper level than typically acknowledged by Kristeva scholars, who emphasize instead her psychoanalytic roots.[40] As Kristeva herself recounts:

> The experience in Bulgaria permitted me at once to live in an extremely closed environment (which is called totalitarianism for good reason, with enormous restriction), to understand the weight of social life, and at the same time to try to find the small spaces of freedom, which include, for example, the arts, the interest in foreign languages, even religion (1996, 49).[41]

The difference Kristeva finds between the French and Bulgarian intellectual scenes of the 1960s, she adds, is that in Soviet-ruled Bulgaria "we had had Bakhtin and the interest in what I called intertext, history, and subjectivity" (50). To this end, while there can be no doubt that the psychoanalytic framework is indeed crucial for understanding Kristeva's work as a whole, by her own admission, it was not until her arrival in France, two full years after the completion of an undergraduate degree in linguistics at the University of Sofia (and the beginning of graduate thesis work under Emile Guéorguiev), that she first read any text on psychoanalysis. During all her Sofia years, she writes, "Freud was conspicuously absent from my intellectual training" (7). This also applied to the work of Jacques Lacan and Melanie Klein, with which she first came into contact through the French intellectual circle known as the Tel Quel group. It was the foothold of those "deep discussion[s] until all hours of the night at 55 Rue de Rennes" (which included the literary critic and Tel Quel founder, Philippe Sollers, who

would later become Kristeva's husband), which helped initiate what she calls her "conversion from linguistics to psychoanalysis" (6-7).

Kristeva's relatively late entry into psychoanalytic discourse theory, predated by her exposure to Bakhtin, helps to explain why she initially chose the question: "how did the novel establish itself as a genre?" for her thesis topic; it is remarkably in keeping with Bakhtin's guiding concern in *Discourse and the Novel* (1934), where he explains: "I will attempt below to approach the novel precisely as a genre-in-the making" (11). On a broader scale, however, the importance of Bakhtin as an early source of intellectual influence is important because it helps to set up a clearer background against which Kristeva's criticisms of structuralism—especially as they appear in *Revolution in Poetic Language*—make sense, especially given the well-known difficulty of the text. In fact, judging from her immersion in French intellectual circles, where structuralism predominated, it would seem difficult to untangle oneself (if not intellectually, academically) from the immense influence of those discourses.

That is to say, Kristeva's relation to structuralism was more than tangential. Upon enrollment at the *École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales* in the spring of 1966, Kristeva not only studied with theorists like Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Lacan, but, by virtue of being funded by the social anthropology lab at the linguistics department, became a lab assistant for Claude Lévi-Strauss himself. And yet despite this, her first published article, appearing in the journal *Critique* of the following year, was on none other than Bakhtin ("Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman").

Certainly, a complex combination of many other factors, such as the political instability of France that gave way to the student revolts of May 1968, the changing

national climate against foreigners in France, or even her positionality as a gendered subject in a male-dominated field might have all led to Kristeva's rejection of structuralism. The *way* in which she rejects it—the approaches and responses she chooses over others— however, are remarkably consistent with what I am here describing as a Bakhtinian interpretation of psychoanalytic theory, one that was held up against what Kristeva perhaps saw as the most restrictive aspects of structuralism: the notion of a unified self-reflective subject and a static view of meaning based on objective, *ahistorical* structures. Her experience in Bulgaria would have provided Kristeva with sufficient reasons to be critical of philosophical frameworks that uncritically incorporated such elements—as in Lacan's use of structuralism to develop Freudian psychoanalytic theory— and to be more sharply aware of instances where those tendencies were arising amongst intellectual scenes.

Structuralism, which employs models of analysis based on forms and their systematic interrelation within structures, was the order of the day in Parisian literary and intellectual circles during the 1960s and 70s (Hénaff 1998, 507). Influenced by the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss' structural analysis gained popularity in post WW-II France, in large part, because it constituted an ideal of scientific objectivism in the human sciences—that "for the first time, a social science is able to formulate necessary relationships"—which would lead the anthropologist, sociologist, psychologist, or even literary critic to "achieve the same kind of progress in his own science as that which has taken place in linguistics" (1963, 33-34). Clearly referencing Saussure's structural linguistics, Lévi-Strauss' emphasis on form over content resonated

well with the psychologists of the Tel-Quel circle (due to Freud's emphasis on unraveling the mysteries of "psychic structures") as well as with the literary critics like Solliers, as the form/content distinction was already in place in literature through the study of genres. Kristeva thus emphasizes the extent to which her arrival in France coincided with "the period of the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss" (1996, 50).

As one of many scholarship students to come to the *École des Hautes Etudes* from Eastern Europe at the time (including Todorov, who preceded Kristeva's departure from Bulgaria by a year), she became keenly aware how "everything that we could bring which was connected to Russian formalism and all the predecessors of structuralism was extremely interesting" to faculty members like Levi-Strauss and Lacan. However, from the beginning, Kristeva asserts, "what interested me was to go *beyond* structuralism, because what was *immediately apparent* to me were the limitations of structuralism" (ibid, my emphasis).

If we take the hermeneutic position that philosophical production is socially and historically constituted, at least to some degree, then Kristeva's reservations about structuralism can be seen in the context of prior views that helped shape or inform those reservations. In a later interview she repeats she "always had reservations about structuralism," only this time adding that she "was more interested in the post-formalists, particularly Bakhtin…[who] sought to go beyond linguistic structures by introducing historical questions (1996, 7)." On this account, Kristeva's solution to the problem of *how*, precisely, to go 'beyond structuralism' was provided by Bakhtin. Consider, for instance, Bakhtin's suggestion in *Discourse in the Novel*:

> Once rhetorical discourse is brought into the study with all its living diversity, it
> cannot fail to have a deeply revolutionizing influence on linguistics and on the

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philosophy of language…philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics, have all postulated a simple and unmediated relation of speaker to his unitary and singular 'own' language, and have postulated as well a simple realization of this language in the monologic utterance of the individual (268-9).

One way Bakhtin introduces 'living diversity' to structural linguistics is through his concept of 'carnival,' which he identifies as a pre-predicative temporal feature of existence characterized by "becoming, change, renewal," one that prevents stasis—whether in the context of ahistorical linguistic structures, static views of literary texts, or dogmatic social discourses— by remaining "hostile to all that is immortalized and completed," rendering instead a constant state of questionability and unfinishedness (*nezavershennost*) he finds to be at the core of culture and the (historically distinctive) social practices that sustain it, such as art and literature (1984, 10). Like the ritual time of ancient Greek festivals, "carnival time" [or the carnivalesque] is rooted in both the body and culture. It manifests itself through bursts of laughter or in avant-garde texts as transgressive parodies of "hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette" connected with those structures (122).[42]

Carnivalesque discourses are integral to the health and vitality of culture because they prevent the ossification of social practices or totalitarian cultural traditions, thereby ensuring that "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity" (1986, 2). In her 1967 essay on Bakhtin, Kristeva describes how "carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and at the same time, is a social and political protest" (1980, 65). In other words, it is a *revolutionary* feature of discursive practice.

But carnival is only one half the story of the 'living diversity' of discourse; as

Bakhtin points out in *Rabelais and his Word* (1965), carnivals and religious feasts make

sense only against the backdrop of everyday time, the rigid flow of time we experience

when immersed in the activities of "official culture" (166). Although we should resist the

homogenization of life and norms presented by official culture, as linguistic beings,

Bakhtin does not think it is ever possible to transcend or escape our social and historical

situatedness. In fact, "the language collective, the plurality of speakers, cannot be ignored

when speaking of language" insofar as meaning, on his view, is generated *dialogically*

through our historical wovenness to others speakers: every utterance always presupposes

an 'other'. This is why "there can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance" in

the way that structural linguistics proposes (1986, 84). For Bakhtin, no matter what one is

talking about,

> a given speaker is not the first to speak about it…[the topic] has already been
> articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways. Various
> viewpoints, world views, and trends cross, converge, and diverge in it. The
> speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed
> objects, giving them names for the first time. Simplistic ideas about
> communication as a logical-psychological basis for the sentence recall this
> mythical Adam (93).

This diachronic dimension is what structural linguistics leaves out. Against this

view, Bakhtin proposes that language is always a "multi-planar phenomenon" that

incorporates both elements of "speech life"—carnival and the dialogic. Although he does

not explain this sufficiently or in any systematic degree, it appears that through carnival's

relation to the material body (laughter) and the view of the self as dialogical, an

interactive link between language, culture and life is formed. As he writes in *The*

Problem of Speech Genres, "language enters life through concrete utterances (which

manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well" (1986, 63). All 'concrete utterances' are always already historical, while carnival is the drive force behind "moments of death and revival, of change and renewal" in the utterance (1984, 8). It is a symbiotic relationship that ensures historical specificity while promoting dynamism and change, much like Kristeva's inseparable oscillation between semiotic and symbolic elements of signification.[43] This interwoven reciprocity between carvinal and dialogic elements can also be seen in *Discourse in the Novel*. Bakhtin writes:

> Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance…linguistics, stylistics, and the philosophy of language that were born and shaped by the current centralizing tendencies in the life of language have ignored this *dialogized heteroglossia*, in which is embodied the centrifugal forces in the life of language" (272-73, my emphasis).

With this overview, we come to the point where Kristeva's response to structuralism can be seen as Bakhtinian, this time, by her own account: "At the beginning of my research, when I was writing a commentary on Bakhtin, I had the feeling that *with these notions of dialogism and carnival we had reached an important point in moving beyond structuralism*" (1996, 189, my emphasis).

Given the importance of other figures like Freud and Hegel in her writing, this contextualization of Kristeva's linguistic theories (through their deep intellectual debt to Bakhtin) might perhaps border on over-historization were it not for the fact that Kristeva does not make a *single* direct reference to Bakhtin in the entirety of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, whether in the French original or English edition. Important secondary literature on Kristeva's *RPL* either make pointed but passing references to Bakhtin (Moi 1997; Oliver, 1993) or no reference whatsoever (Bearsworth, 2004).

In 1985, the year after the English translation of *RPL* was published, Margaret Waller asked Kristeva about this absence, and the actual role Bakhtin played in her work. In response, Kristeva comments, "with as much intellectual honesty as possible," that her concepts of "intertextuality" and the "subject-in-process" (as an 'unfinishedness') can be traced back to Bakhtin (1996, 190). To this, I would add the notion of poetic language as a dynamic interaction between two different modalities of the signifying process and the polyvalent concept of genotext/phenotext. The latter is especially evident since she acknowledges Bakhtin "was moving toward"—I would say *had*— "a dynamic understanding of the literary text that considered every utterance as the result of the intersection within it of a number of voices" or forces (ibid).

Kristeva's reception of psychoanalytic discourse theory can also be largely understood though her ongoing dialogue with Bakhtin's core themes and ideas, a dialogue made possible to a great extent through her own experiences of social repression in Soviet-ruled Bulgaria. Just as Bakhtin provided the scheme to move beyond structuralism by both pluralizing and nesting language within an interpretive web of social and historical practices, Freud provided Kristeva with the framework by which her commitments to semantic plurality, the dynamism of the speaking subject, and the importance of the autoerotic body could take shape. It was a way to go beyond limitations in Bakhtin's own account of carnival as transgression, particularly in *Rabelais and His Word*. That is to say, Bakhtin identified the carnivalesque in literary works and criticized structural linguistics for neglecting this dimension, but he did not offer a comprehensive account of this element in language, such as noting its preconditions, how it functions, or its ability to break up the "inertia" of official or "authoritative discourse" (1981, 344).

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This helps explain what Kristeva largely meant by her assertion, "the psychoanalytic experience struck me as the only one in which the wildness of the speaking being, and of language can be *heard*" (1997, 19, my emphasis). Freud gave us a tangible way to 'get at,' so to speak, the carnivalesque through a formal theory of the unconscious. In *Revolution and Poetic Language*, Kristeva writes that "it is nonetheless evident that this subject, in order to tally with its heterogeneity, must be, let us say, a questionable *subject-in-process*. It is of course Freud's theory of the unconscious that allows the *apprehension* of such a subject" (135, second emphasis added). Bakhtin points to it, but only with "the theory of the unconscious" can we actually "read in this rhythmic space" or talk about in any meaningful way (1984, 26). And yet, had Kristeva's cultural background or early intellectual influences been different, *Revolution in Poetic Language* might have taken a very different route. This insight will be important later on in this chapter, when the applicability of Kristeva's linguistic theories for postcolonial contexts is considered. First, though, a more detailed look at her landmark work is necessary.

III.   Revolution in Poetic Language: Strengths and Limitations

Kristva's *La Révolution du Langage Poétique: l'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (1974) was originally a sweeping 645 page doctoral dissertation comprised of two sections: a main, theoretical portion followed by a lengthy, applied analysis of modern (Anglo-European) literary texts based on themes and methods introduced in the first section. It is the first, theoretical part that forms the basis of Margaret Waller's English translation, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984).[44]

As a revision to Lacanian theories of language acquisition that posit a unitary, self-conscious subject behind (post-Oedipal) signifying activity, Kristeva's main thesis in *RPL* concerns the heterogeneity of the speaking subject, both *prior* to and *after* its entrance into the social realm. In dispelling the traditional Cartesian "notion of the judging subject as a fixed point" (118) in structuralist views of language— one that is disconnected from both pre-predicative bodily drives and desires and the affective dimension of speech (i.e., rhythms, tones, intonation)—Kristeva's aim in *RPL* is to show that in fact, "the subject never *is*; the *subject* is only the *signifying process* and he appears only as a *signifying practice*" that is as fluid and dynamic as the processes that constitute him or her as a 'subject' (215). [45]

Historically, the psychoanalytic interest in subjectivity and its relation to language derives from Freud's psychological theories and his need, as a physician of nervous disorders, to develop a clinical model that could account for a range of somatic symptoms and conditions with no clear etiology in the material body (such as a brain lesion). As he describes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), his patients often presented an array of bodily symptoms that spanned from syncope, fatigue and nausea, to "pains in the neck, abdomen, stomach," or even vomiting (93); to relieve his patient's suffering, a cure would have to be provided that medically linked these symptoms to abnormalities in processes originating within the individuals themselves, whether as organic conditions, biological processes, or some form thereof. In other words, as a trained neurologist, Freud sought to stay within "the bounds of neuro-pathological interest" (ix) and the discursive paradigm of late nineteenth, early twentieth century neurophysiology, even

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when modifying its assumptions or adding to its diagnostic vocabulary through expansive notions of "psychic life" (466).

Thus, for Freud, who viewed the brain as biological matter that functions through mind-dependent states that can be observed in their relation to human behavior, abnormalities in his patient's behavior like "hysterical phobias, obsessions, and delusions" could be traced back to pathologies in the brain's *activities* —to process-driven "psychic structures" that form the basis for an individual's inner experience of themselves (their 'psychic life') via their product: thought (v). By attributing 'pathologies' in behavior to psychic structures, Freud established a link between the mind (*psyche*) and the material body (*soma*) (hence the term '*psychosomatic'*) that became deeply influential for twentieth-century neuropsychology. Psychosomatic symptoms were mentally induced symptoms. That is to say, they were brought on by a thought process that remained hidden from the sufferer's view. If they were not hidden and were instead transparent, then patients suffering from symptoms could, at least in theory, self-reflectively gain access to the source of their own maladies, demystify their origin, and potentially gain therapeutic relief by identifying the source of their suffering. Patients, of course, experienced these symptoms as acutely as organic illnesses. To solve this predicament, Freud famously postulated the existence of a *split* psychological subject whose unity (as an 'I') is generated through various inner struggles and conflicts taking place at *differing* levels of consciousness, thereby dividing the mind into "conscious" and "unconscious" parts.[46]

Using interpretive methods drawn from clinical models, the job of the

psychoanalyst is precisely to try to analyze her patient's symptoms and behavior in order to establish a link to primary processes and motivations residing in the unconscious part of her mind, which the patient cannot herself access but can manifest itself through her speech—through slips of the tongue, jokes, innuendo, double-entendre, or through dreams. However, to spot one of these slips or to know what her dreams are, the 'analysand' (psychoanalytic patient) must first *communicate* them to her analyst. Hence, under the psychoanalytic framework, gaining access to the patient's mind relies on a view of language as a vehicle or medium—a diagnostic vessel, without which, analysis of the psyche would prove impossible. As Kristeva explains:

> Psychoanalysis sees the patient's speech as its object. The psychoanalyst has no other means within his reach, no other reality with which to explore the conscious or unconscious functioning of the subject, than speech and its laws and structures…while the psychiatrist may look for a physical lesion as the cause of a disturbance, the psychoanalyst refers only to what the subject says…he discovers in his discourse first the unconscious, then the more or less conscious *motivation* producing the symptoms. Once he has discovered this motivation, all the neurotic behavior denotes an obvious logic, and the symptom appears as the symbol of this finally rediscovered motivation (1989, 266).

The interest in subjectivity thus stems from the type of psychic structures the psychoanalytic therapeutic model must postulate to address phenomena in terms of the 'inner' life or 'psychic life' of patients. Given its roots in the medical sciences, which operates under a *developmental* model of the organic body, this interest led to theoretical speculation about the *onset* of the subject itself—its differentiation as an individual from the collective as well as its entrance into social structures like language and the family (i.e., kinship relations).

For Freud, unconscious bodily drives do not manifest themselves in their original,

unmediated organic form— i.e., as pre-verbal energy discharges or "drive pressure" [*Triebdrang*] on the psyche (which initiates Freudian 'slips' of the tongue, etc.)—but rather in terms of already intelligible social structures that, coincidentally, also characterize the onset of the subject as an individual in culture. What this means is that, for Freud, there exists one universal social structure all humans are initiated into in order to be 'social,' and which revolves around a series of family complexes described (in terms of the Sophoclean Greek tragedy) as the "Oedipal situation". Although this model of the family drama is oddly more in keeping with eighteenth century upper-middle class Viennese society (and the correlate ethos of sexually repressive Victorian social mores), nonetheless, the Oedipal situation became the basis for the psychoanalytic understanding of the subject.

For Freud as for his successor, Lacan, all subjectivity is '*post*-Oedipal' because it is the end result of processes initiated in the early developmental life of a child. These processes are governed by the universal laws of the Oedipal family drama, such as the fear of castration and the Law of the Father. They also provide the necessary motivation for humans to relinquish their reliance on the safe confines of the mother-child dyad and to begin speaking in terms of 'symbolic' signifying structures like grammar (Oliver 1993, 19-23).[47]

Thus, under psychoanalytic discourse theory, language acquisition goes hand in hand with the onset of subjectivity. Specifically, for Lacan, subjectivity is initiated through the 'mirror phase' that occurs between 6-18 months of age; before that, the human child is an aggregate bundle of unorganized impulses and energy drives that make

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the child's experience of herself disorderly, jumbled, and fragmentary at best. Lacan calls

this stage the 'imaginary phase'. As Kelly Oliver explains,

> In the 'imaginary' phase, the child has only fragmented experiences and no unified sense of self. In the mirror stage the child held in front of a mirror by an adult recognizes its image in the mirror. At first it confuses the image with reality. After some experimentation, it realizes that the image reflected is its own image and not just the adult's. Finally, it realizes the mirror image is not real. The mirror stage is the first recognition of the 'I'…what is paradoxical in the mirror stage is that the realization that the child is unified comes through its *doubling* in the mirror. In a sense, it must become two (itself plus its reflection) in order to become one (a unified self) (1993, 20).

For Lacan, the mirror stage sets up the conditions for a child to enter into

language (understood here as a signifying practice) on account of this *representational*

doubling between itself and the *image* of itself in the mirror. Following Oliver's

explanation, because the image is in fact a stand-in and performs the function of a

symbol, "this substitution of the symbolic for the real body prefigures all subsequent

development," including the child's shifting identifications with different protagonists in

the family drama, as well as language use (ibid). The idea that this representational

doubling prefigures language use, however, is built on the assumption that language is

indeed a representational structure or modeled on subject/object principles. Lacan, who

famously asserted "the unconscious is structured like a language" (1977, 234), holds this

view because it is consistent with his broader intellectual framework. That is to say,

Lacan develops Freud's theories by further systematizing the unconscious through

principles gathered from Lévi-Strauss' structural linguistics, and a representational view

of language is the only one compatible with such a model of the unconscious.

For Kristeva, Lacan's theories "fail to articulate [the infant's] transitional link to

the post-Oedipal subject " accurately (22). Once the mirror stage is passed, Lacan assumes that the child is now a structured, unified self who is capable of conveying meaning through language. Although on Kristeva's view, the onset of the subject does occur upon its entrance into language, it is never unified, unaffected by forces that existed prior to the mirror stage. Along with the post-Oedipal subject, there is also a pre-predicative "psychosomatic modality of the signifying process" that continues to influence the developing infant even past its positing as a subject (28). For Kristeva, the onset of the subject is thus *prefigured* by a series of kinetic bodily processes that originate in the infant's relation to the maternal body, and which she explores at length in *RPL*.

Kristeva's strategy in *RPL* is then to *reinvest* language with the full complexity and dynamism of pre-linguistic drives (which she borrows from Freudian drive theory) while at the same time identifying the material body as *already replete* with all the *pre-*Oedipal structures and primary processes necessary to initiate the onset of signification—to separate the developing infant from its reliance on the mother and usher them into the social practices and structures necessary to make speech 'meaningful' in a culturally-situated way.[48] Because of the infant's pre-verbal bodily history, on Kristeva's view, speech is always more than speech acts and involves deeper laws and processes than those acknowledged in structural linguistics. She writes:

> Linguistic semiology generally shares the thesis that meaning is a 'substance' preexisting in its 'formation' in an expression—either a sentence or a sign (morpheme, lexeme, etc.)—assumed by the thinking subject…by contrast, in our view, one must distinguish language from other signifying systems and consider the linguistic sign (and the dichotomies it can give rise to: expression/content, etc.) as only one stage of the signifying process (1984, 38-39).

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To this end, in *RPL* Kristeva conceives of language as the dynamic unfurling of a signifying *process* whereby meaning is produced through an oscillating tension "between two irreconcilable elements—separate but inseparable from the [signifying] *process* in which they assume asymmetrical functions" (82). She terms these two elements "the symbolic" and "the semiotic". The symbolic element is the one more familiar to us, as it is "imposed by the social realm" (48). It is what gives shape to language through an ordering principle [*ordonancement*] based "on socio-historical constraints, such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure" (26, 29). It takes the child's random echolalias and organizes them based on social and cultural pre-understandings, so that what the child says becomes intelligible in a particular cultural matrix. As a source of boundaries and constraints, it manifests itself most powerfully in syntax and grammatical categories, which impose further limits on what kinds of utterances one can say and how one can say them. The symbolic thus "appears in propositions" (41); the difference for Kristeva, is that while structural linguistics (and by proxy, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory) took this to be *the* fundamental factor in shaping the child's utterances after the mirror stage, for Kristeva, it is only one element of a larger signifying process. It is the tip of the iceberg rather than the base of the mountain, albeit a point *without* which one could not speak in any meaningful way at all.

By contrast, the semiotic is Kristeva's contribution to psychoanalytic discourse theory. With it, she goes beyond structural linguistics and reinvests language with motility and bodily dynamism. The term, she writes, is taken from the Greek word *semion*, meaning "distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign" (25). It consists of pre-

linguistic drives and desires that are "articulated by a flow and marks" and "energy transfers" below the level of consciousness (40). Following Freudian drive theory, Kristeva believes the "the human body is also a process. It is not a unity but a plural totality" which constitutes the "place where the drives are applied" (101). That is to say, for both Freud and Kristeva "discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such"; consequently, it is replete with energy drives that, when discharged, motivate (in the literal sense of initiating movement) organic processes like digestion and metabolic functions. However, for Kristeva, these drives always "connect and orient the body to the mother" by way of gestational links—the vibration in the womb from the mother's voice is one example (27).

Thus, by semiotic, Kristeva means "the effects of meaning that are not reducible to language," such as the child's echolalias, "the play of colors in an abstract painting or a piece of music that lacks signification but has meaning" in the broader sense of an inarticulable weight or import on us (1996, 21). If signification were only semiotic, however, our speech would manifest itself in meaningless babble or psychotic drivel. This means there is no one without the other: "because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (24).

The semiotic makes it possible for Kristeva to "to disclose a fundamental stage—or region—in the process of the subject, a state that is hidden by the arrival of signification" (40). This is the Pre-Oedipal maternal realm Lacan neglected as a

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significant source of influence in the constitution of the subject. As Kristeva contends, before the onset of subjectivity in the mirror stage (followed by its completion in the Freudian stage of castration), the child's body is invested by a series of energy 'waves' and 'stases' that can be compared to the primary processes of condensation [*Verdichtung*] and displacement [*Verschiebung*] in Freud (60). This continuous rhythmic flow of energy transfers undergo 'stases' when they are "checked by the constraints of biological and social structures," in other words, by the symbolic (28). In prenatal life that is not yet subject to the symbolic realm of signification, the repetition of these drive charges produces stases that allows the rhythmic flow to remain dynamic (27).

This oscillating process of charges and stases—and not simply a Freudian fear of castration or the Law of the Father— are what motivate the subject to relinquish the attachment to the mother's body and initiate symbolic speech on their own. In this way, they "produce" the subject (27). Kristeva refers to this dialectical process of semiotic drive charges and stases as "negativity" to distinguish it from Hegelian "negation, which is the act of a judging subject" (28). Negativity describes the temporal axis of the Pre-Oedipal, insofar as it is used to describe a *process* and an activity. For the metaphysically ambiguous pre-Oedipal spatial dimension, Kristeva borrows the term "chora" from Plato's *Timaeus*.

According to Kristeva, the chora is the place where the oscillating process of charges and stases (negativity) can take place (28). It is an "essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation *constituted by* movements and their ephemeral stases" (25, my emphasis). That is to say, its existence as a "nonexpressive totality" is a theoretical pre-requisite for understanding the processes that follow it: "the chora is

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generated *in order to* attain to this signifying position" that follows the mirror stage, and for this reason it must theoretically precede and underlie all figuration (the symbolic) (26, my emphasis). Put otherwise, one cannot order space without the theoretical positing of pre-creation space. The chora performs the theoretical role of pre-creation space. Thus, while the symbolic "orders" [*ordonancement*] the semiotic elements of signification, the chora is the *preverbal semiotic space* where regulating process [*réglemmentation*] may occur. This is why the chora is associated with the mother's body: because its processes of motility in gestation are pre-Oedipal and pre-symbolic. Since the mother's gestational body already contains all the logic necessary to initiate the later processes Freud and Lacan ascribe to the mirror stage and castration, "it is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*" (27).

Kristeva also refers to "the signifying process as a thetic negativity" (55). According to her, the "thetic" is a stage in the constitution of the subject that "marks the threshold" between the semiotic and the symbolic (48). We can think of the thetic phase as a crucial moment of transition between "heterogeneous realms" brought about by negativity (that is, by the oscillating tension between pre-linguistic drive charges and their stases). It is a formal break or scission that ushers one into the symbolic realm of signification, "which is always that of a proposition or judgment, in other words, a realm of *positions*" (43). Its counterpart in the mother-child dyad is the moment of separation from the maternal body during birth. For Lacan, this separation would be total and complete. Instead, Kristeva's semiotic realm ensures that, even past the thetic phase initiating the child into the symbolic order, an umbilical link remains that challenges this

order. The thetic phase requires the child to 'take a position,' to think of herself as a self in order for "the possibility of enunciation" to materialize (44). In this way, Kristeva writes, "the thetic is the precondition for both enunciation and denotation" in the formal sense (53).

Here is where Kristeva's developmental, though dynamic, view of language acquisition and subjectivity begins to pose limitations for applications to Amerindian and postcolonial settings, where historically, 'language' has come to mean something different that is perhaps obfuscated by Kristeva's model.

We find this difficulty most strikingly in the thetic stage of the signifying process. According to Kristeva, "even if it is presented as a simple act of naming, we maintain that the thetic is already *propositional* (or syntactic) and that syntax is the exposition of the thetic" (54). This alone would not be problematic, as by including 'syntactic' in the description Kristeva allows for grammatical formations that are not necessarily propositional. She follows this statement, however, with the claim that "the subject and predicate represent the division *inherent* in the thetic" (ibid, emphasis mine). Again, to say something is inherent does not mean it will *necessarily* lead to its expression. Yet she insists, both in *RPL* and in the course of later writings of the 1970s, that the grammatical structures of 'subject' and the 'predicate' are "indissociable from the thetic process" (54). If syntax is the exposition of the thetic, as Kristeva seems to suggest, then the polysemous syntax of Nahua lexical structure posits a very different kind of speaking subject than Kristeva's thetic seems to allow for—a speaking subject that is always already constituted by a semiotic-like state of in-betweenness and change that is not

propositional.

Structurally, Kristeva needs to posit a symbolic realm that is characterized by subject-predicate grammar because only in this way can (semiotic) poetic language *break up* or destabilize the symbolic, whether through avant-garde art or the paratactic lexical structures of poems that displace the expectation of meaning in a text. Yet the problem with the colonial legacy in Latin America is that it obfuscated the ways in which the symbolic realm was always *already* invested with semiotic drive force, to use Kristeva's terms. It was already vested with "drive, sensation, prelanguage, rhythm, melody, and so on" that Kristeva finds to be her contribution to theories of linguistic practice. Were it not for the fact that Kristeva's psychoanalytic model commits her to basic claims about the universal nature of her project—that the model of language acquisition and subject constitution she presents is true at the species-wide level— it would be far less of a problem for theoretical applications in North-South contexts because it would have no direct bearing on the Amerindian experience.[49]

Having said this, I have always been committed to the idea that no theoretical approach should be foreclosed in advance of its possible interpretation by different communities of interpreters—communities that may have very different needs as well as political, philosophical, and interpretive commitments. This is why I have taken the trouble of carefully situating Kristeva's work historically, within the broader paradigms of Eastern European and French intellectual history. It helps us get a glimpse of the context in which those projects may have originated, the mortar out of which they

formed, and hence the general spirit that supports them. For instance, we can say that

given French intellectual history and her Bakhtinian roots, Kristeva's early work in *RPL*

helps initiate a post-structuralist view of language in semiotics. She writes:

> When I worked within semiology, I was what you at present would call a postmodernist. That is, I had a dynamic view of meaning, where I took the speaking subject and its history into consideration. And when I considered the speaking subject, it was in order to penetrate further into the decisive situations of the psyche. You will find these decisive situations in, for instance, the process of a child learning language. In psychosis. Or in avant-garde literature, in Mallarme, Lautreamont, Proust, Joyce…

But this was because, she continues, "I was very influenced at this time by the works of

Bakhtin, who…also tried to seize upon something specific in the literary text that did not

necessarily appear on the level of language, even if it involved deep laws of

communication that could also be attributed to this same level of language" (1996,19).

But understanding the specific role a concept plays in the broader context of a

thinker's work is, of course, not an argument against the possibility of deploying that

concept creatively towards other ends and projects, even those the author did not

originally envision. Kristeva's work, for example, allows us to get at one side of the

'double bind' of postcolonial communication by emphasizing, as Anzaldúa does, the

present-day ruptures and lapses in the continuity of meaning that add an often

unacknowledged layer of complexity to verbal communication. When asked why

establishing the semiotic element of communication is important to the study of

language, Kristeva replies that it is vital "so as to recognize the phenomena that are so

common in the daily life of subjective experience…where signification disintegrates,

arriving at lower thresholds of meaning that do not coincide with normal communication,

if not a total eclipse of signification" (1996, 22).

As is so often the case, scholars working in marginal areas of philosophy are often initially drawn or pointed towards interpretive frameworks that are already established, or have been translated into the dominant languages of Western philosophic discourse, such as French, German, or English. Frustration may ensue when, despite finding multiple points of congruence, enough discontinuities emerge which initiate broader questions of applicability towards specific socio-political and historical contexts. I ask myself: if this framework accounts for the process of signification in general, can it account for the problem of *postcolonial* signification or meaning formation in particular? The question is often held in abeyance for lack of an established framework to offer as a response and is related to the lack (until very recently) of translated scholarly *sources* from Latin America and a tendency towards disciplinary conservatism in engaging philosophical discourses outside the tradition.

On another scale, understanding the historical context and embeddedness out of which philosophical bodies of work emerge can help ease the burden of having to reject large parts of philosophical frameworks one otherwise finds empowering or useful for one's projects on account of applicability. We can bring this approach to Kristeva's work on linguistics by noting that Kristeva, from the beginning, is primarily a scholar that is interested in *texts* and textual practice. She is an interpreter of literature, writes on literary genius, and considers "Rabelais, Swift, Sade, Lautréamont, Kafka, and Bataille" as marginalized voices "on the fringe of official culture" (1983, 86). Although one can

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cherish such High Renaissance and modern European writers for their transgressive

narratives in Western literature, they fail to capture what it means to be "on the fringe of

official culture" for subaltern, postcolonial peoples who cannot even include *literacy* as a

category unencumbered by historical oppression. This is not to fault Kristeva for her

positions, but rather to show how historical backdrops inform those positions, creating

blind spots in areas our respective histories allow us to take for granted. Kristeva is not

attuned to the ways literacy, textuality, or even the alphabet can be a source of oppression

because she identifies with a Western European cultural context that is Byzantine:

> I learned from Bulgaria the importance of culture. Bulgaria is the country in which the Slavonic alphabet was created. It was two Bulgarian brothers, Cyril and Methodius, who gave the Slavonic alphabet to the world—it is now the alphabet that the Russians use. There is in Bulgaria a Feast of the Alphabet, probably the only one in the world. Every year on May 24, children parade through the streets of Sofia, each displaying a letter on their fronts, so we are identified with the alphabet (1997, 160-161).

Finding sources that, in the absence of current scholarly alternatives, better speak to the

concerns and 'double binds' of postcolonial communication will hence be the subject of

our next chapter. Having set up this problem, I want to suggest that Nietzsche's account

of language is uniquely suited to address these issues of marginality, multiplicitous

subjectivity, and complex communication and is able to overcome some of the theoretical

prejudices associated with Kristeva's developmental position.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Hydric Life: Nietzsche on Language and Multiplicitous Experience

> She has this fear   that she has no names   that she
> has many names   that she doesn't know her names   She has
> this fear   that she's an image…the fear that she's the dreamwork
> inside someone else's skull   She has this fear   that if
> she takes off her clothes…   that if she digs
> into herself   she won't find anyone.

> --Anzaldúa, Borderlands/*La Frontera*, 65

> *We are none of us* that which we appear to be in accordance with the states
> for which alone we have consciousness and words.

> --Nietzsche, Daybreak, 71

In this chapter I explore the applicability of Friedrich Nietzsche's views on language for Latin American postcolonial theory. By expanding on his theories of language and his related account of lived experience as fluid, multifarious and complex, I argue that Nietzsche is a valuable ally in discussions of postcolonial communication. In particular, I suggest that he provides us with a uniquely pluralistic theoretical model that is receptive to many of the concerns articulated by Latina writers (such as Gloria Anzaldúa in her *Borderlands/La Frontera*), who critically engage the lived-experience of the postcolonial subject.[50]

It is important to note that the idea to situate Nietzsche's anti-foundational and perspectival philosophy in a Latin American context is nothing new. In fact, as Diego

Vacano suggests, "Nietzsche's influence in Latin America has been deep, even if not thoroughly comprehended or studied" on a large scale (2003). While Latin American philosophers working in the United States have been attuned to this influence (Acampora 2006, Schutte 1984) in recent years, philosophers and social theorists working in Latin America have also made significant contributions in revaluating different strands of Nietzsche's thought (Bayona 2009, Hanza 2007, Barrenechea 2006, Casares 2001, Rivero-Weber 2000), some with considerable attention to its applicability in the region (Marton 2006). While some of this interest can be attributed to the success of Michel Foucault's power/knowledge paradigm for analyzing the structural component of social, economic, and institutional problems in Latin America[51], it can also be seen as part of a continued engagement with the works of Latin American thinkers influenced by Nietzsche, such as José Carlos Mariátegui. What distinguishes my appropriation of Nietzsche from others is the suggestion that his views on language are uniquely suited to capture the embodied, communicative alterity and ruptures in meaning that are endemic to the postcolonial subject in Latin America. Before turning to this analysis, however, we have to first get clear about the multiple accounts of language that Nietzsche gave throughout his career.

The first account of language can be seen as part of his critique of metaphysics, which attempts to dismantle the underlying canonical assumptions behind the Western philosophical tradition, especially in the works of Plato and Descartes. When he talks about language in this context, Nietzsche mainly relies on, what we have called, a designative view of language, described in terms of syntax, grammar, and rules of

orthography.

The second account he gives is of language as a *social* background. This view, which appears as early as the winter 1869 – spring 1870 notebook of his unpublished writings and reappears consistently thereafter, relies on hermeneutic principles that see the individual speaking subject as inextricably bound to her socio-historical context. Due to the influence of, what I consider to be overly 'existentialist' (i.e. Sartrean) readings of Nietzsche, however, this view is often overlooked.

The third and most complex account is of language as a pre-conscious metaphorical activity. Influenced by Nietzsche's study of Greek rhetoric, nineteenth-century physiology and Eduard von Hartmann's (1842-1906) notion of the unconscious in *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (1869), this view links dynamic, pre-predicative bodily drives and nerve impulses to speech through a series of metonymical transferences or transpositions. It is a relatively early view that begins to take shape in the 1860s and forms the backdrop for an important series of lectures on ancient rhetoric that Nietzsche gave in 1872-73 while a professor at the University of Basel. Although the emphasis on metaphor wanes in his middle and later writings—persisting only as a theory of drives, and later, as the 'will to power'—this third account is especially important for my project. This is because it not only provides the basis for understanding Nietzsche's overall attitude towards language as modeled on the Apollonian-Dionysian symbiosis (which captures the tension between the influence of the social dimension and each individual's concrete, bodily specificity in relation to the social), but because it paints a picture of human communication as a more complex phenomenon that traditionally conceived in the Western philosophical tradition. This will be the key to providing a theoretical

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framework in which the contradictory and multiplicitous aspects of postcolonial life can be more meaningfully acknowledged, pointing us in the direction of what I call 'hydric' life. With this introduction in place, we can now begin a closer examination of each of Nietzsche's three accounts of language.

I. Language as Critique of Metaphysics

According to Nietzsche, "the philosopher is caught in the nets of *language*" (E 133)[52] regardless of the nature of her individual philosophical projects. While, at a deeper level, this owes to the fact we can only "express our thoughts with the words that lie to hand," or, to be more precise, that as social beings "we have at any moment *only the thought for which we have to hand the words*" (D 145), it is primarily attributed to her everyday entanglement in grammar. In order to relay concepts through speech or writing, she must employ a system of conventional rules that organize those concepts. This is similar to Foucault's idea that "the grammatical arrangements of a language are the *a priori* of what can be expressed in it" (1970, 270). That is to say, prior to her positing of theories, there is always a background structure that has *already* delimited the ways in which those theories may come to be posited, thus negating any direct epistemological relation between our thoughts and knowledge of the 'external' world. This is the net that Nietzsche thinks corralled all of Descartes' philosophy.

For Nietzsche, Descartes' bifurcation of immaterial and material substances, his positing of a necessary subject behind all subject-based activity, 'thinking', is in turn only

conceivable through a language whose grammatical arrangements support those assumptions. As Nietzsche writes, "that when there is thought there has to be something 'that thinks' is simply a formulation of our grammatical custom that adds a doer to every deed," and it is on account of "the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it)" that Descartes "conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a 'subject'" (GM 481). Attributing causality to the bifurcation of active and passive grammatical constructs is, on this account, mankind's "everlasting grammatical blunder" (D 76). Yet it is a blunder Western culture continues to proliferate, making it increasingly difficult for each generation to see that "language is built in terms of the most naive prejudices" (LN 110). This has reached such an extent in modern culture that Nietzsche thinks

> the last thing in metaphysics we'll rid ourselves of is the oldest stock, assuming we *can* rid ourselves of it—that stock which has embodied itself in language and the grammatical categories and made itself so indispensable that it almost seems we would cease being able to think if we relinquished it (LN 124).

This includes the belief in "reason" and "truth," so that "philosophers, in particular, have the greatest difficulty in freeing themselves" from this framework (ibid). Thus, as a critique of metaphysics, Nietzsche's theory of language is foremost a criticism of the dominant conceptual frameworks he believed to be operative in modern Western culture. In particular, Nietzsche believed these frameworks, because of their underlying system of values and their deep calcification in Western culture, significantly restricted human articulative potential. This is especially the case for vital (Dionysian), polyphonic drives and affects that, for Nietzsche, are part and parcel with the dynamism of lived experience.[53] On his view, because the dominant linguistic frameworks of modernity operate on the basis of a *particular* set of metaphysical assumptions—assumptions which

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play a delimiting role in the very mechanisms that structure signifying systems—what one can and cannot say is already being delimited by the very structures traditional views of language presuppose as *neutral and value-free*. Nietzsche could not be more clear when he says: "up to now belief in grammar, in the linguistic subject, object, in verbs has subjugated the metaphysicians: I teach the renunciation of this belief" (LN 21).

Again, the Cartesian subject and the division of subjects as separate entities over and against objects, and the inner/outer model of reality are all fictions made possible by linguistic 'structures,' whose original basis as culturally situated social practices has been forgotten. This means they are not true in themselves. Rather, their appearance as 'real' occurred over long periods of time and through the instilled habit of our daily practices. Thus, the example of grammar and the discursive effects produced by it also point to the social construction of truth, which Nietzsche illustrated by questioning "the value of these values themselves" (GM 456). That is, he described how "we put certain value into things" and then forget "we were the ones who put them in" to begin with (LN 109).[54]

Recovering the idea that "*we* were the givers and the granters" of our social valuations is important because it calls into question essentialist and naturalistic explanations for our lives and the cultural practices that shape it (GS 171). However, although Nietzsche thinks "only we have created the world *that concerns human beings*!"—i.e., that the things that show up as mattering to us do so on account of human valuations rather than otherworldly truths—it is "precisely this knowledge we lack, and when we catch it for a moment we have forgotten it the next" (ibid). In fact, beyond getting just a glimpse of it through a critical stance of constant questioning, we do not

just forget. We forget *that* we forget, making that much more difficult to de-automatize

our everyday mode of engagement with language as a grammatical structure.

And yet, paradoxically, Nietzsche thinks this is not an altogether dispensable

dimension of experience, for "only thus" do our valuations, acts, and practices "*have an*

effect" (GS 41). That is to say, for Nietzsche, while grammatical structures may only be a

surface-level phenomenon characteristic of the *conventional* view of language in

nineteenth century Germany, it is also the case that these structures operate as if they

were true in themselves, lending a certain amount of order and structure to everyday life,

without which, we could not live.[55] We will return to this concept in detail in the next

section. Here, it is sufficient to note that for Nietzsche grammar (as a system of rules

arranged through a particular logic), like other forms of conventional logics, does not

constitute "'understanding', [*Verstehen*] but a designating in order to *make oneself*

understood" to others in society, who also depend on these structures (LN 109). It is thus

indispensable if one is to communicate through speech. In a different way, it is also

indispensable because "this feeling" of being in the midst of things (or immersed in social

valuations) "produces life" in terms of lived experience (LN 109). It makes the world

intelligible and allows us to go about our daily lives as social beings. But it is only *one*

way of making lived experience "graspable" in terms that can be communicated, leading

Nietzsche to question whether the only kinds of experiences that exist are those that can

be communicated (through grammatical speech)—whether there is "an unknown, perhaps

unknowable, *but felt text*" that also exerts an influence on us, but which cannot be named

on account of its non-social origin (D 76, my emphasis). Nietzsche's answer to this

question will lead us to the importance of the body as a deeply influential, yet perhaps unnamable dimension of language later in this chapter.

It should now be clear that by describing the sustaining role grammar plays in subject-object representational thinking, Nietzsche obviously does not endorse the designative view of language as correct, but merely uses it to stress the ways that deeply calcified assumptions can lead us to hold firm to particular conceptual frameworks, including the belief in a unified subject or in a two-world metaphysics. To lead us in the direction of Nietzsche's lifelong project of producing an account of language modeled on the oscillating tensions between the Apollonian and Dionysian dimensions of experience, we now turn to the social (Apollonian) dimension.[56]

II.   Language as a Social Dimension

In order to gain a broader understanding of Nietzsche's account of language as a social background, we have to first dismantle the conventional interpretation of Nietzsche as an existentialist. Along with Kierkegaard and Sartre, Nietzsche is typically seen as providing the philosophical foundation for modern existentialism. Given the emphasis on self-overcoming, critiques of mass conformism and active nihilism, his better-known writings like the *Genealogy of Morals* and *Gay Science* lend themselves more prominently to the view of the self as a radically free individual who has courageously "forsaken land and gone to sea," even "destroyed the bridge behind them" in efforts to unshackle oneself from conventional values and morality (GS 119). The assumption that it is possible, in principle, to detach ourselves from value-laden worldly relations

culminates in the idea of the self as not merely a reevaluator, but an active *creator* of new

tables of values. Thus, on the existentialist reading, Nietzsche's conception of the

relation between culture and the individual is not thought to be one of mutual

interdependence. For instance, in *Dialogues with Nietzsche* Gianni Vattimo explains that

for Nietzsche,

> to create values signifies *tout court* to create truth criteria. Only by creating new
> values, tearing herself violently free of the world of prevailing evaluations and the
> instincts, can the philosopher also engage in demythification…the new value
> stands radically outside the orbit of the old world. The philosopher who does not
> accept this responsibility to stand alone, who prefers the company of his
> contemporaries, who wants to belong to his time (or also to take action in his
> time) founds nothing; he contents himself with being the expression of his epoch
> or a certain society and codifies the dominant prejudices and instincts (2006, 67).

This interpretation of the 'authentic' Nietzschean individual is, in my view, overly

influenced by a quasi-Sartrean conception of radical freedom, one that often locates

Nietzsche as the author of "perhaps the most radical freedom-as-autonomy position" in

modern philosophy (Guay 2006, 362). While this is not to suggest the interpretation

Vattimo or Guay offer is wrong—as Nietzsche himself reminds us: "the same text allows

for countless interpretations: there is no 'correct' interpretation" (LN 63)— Nietzsche's

account of the relation between individuals and society, I believe, is more nuanced.

Generally, what often gets overlooked in this approach is Nietzsche's assertion that we

cannot detach ourselves *entirely* from our worldly relations and conceptual habits

because they are dependent on both individual bodily attunements *and* ordinary social

understandings. Since without these social understandings *thought itself* would not be

possible, Nietzsche's solution, as we'll see, will be to draw on an altogether different

dimension of experience that is pre-social, but which may perhaps be unnamable on

account of this feature. His problematic, which finds congruence in his theory of

language, is to try to talk about this dimension—to flesh it out in a philosophical manner— despite the tremendous difficulties involved in such a task. This, of course, may require a whole new way of philosophizing.

According to Nietzsche, human consciousness "is really just a net connecting one person with another," but this bond does not originate with individual, self-encapsulated 'minds' communicating with one another through shared (yet arbitrary) symbols (GS 213). As Nietzsche writes, it was "only as a *social animal* that man learned to become conscious of himself" in the first place because "conscious thinking takes place in words" that *already* serve as "communication symbols" in culture: their meaning, so to speak, has already been delimited in ways particular to a given historical tradition (Ibid). This is a position Nietzsche began cultivating quite early in his thinking. As early as 1871 he writes: "a symbol that has been *noticed* is always a concept: one conceives what one is able to name and distinguish" (E 20). That is to say, to perceive something at the level of conscious thought is to have already interpreted its possible range of meanings. "What alone can knowing be? Interpretation," he says, "*not* 'explanation'" (LN 76) because explanation assumes a level of theoretical abstraction and detachment Nietzsche thinks is not possible when talking about our knowledge of human experience. Knowledge is always tracing "something unfamiliar," like a bare sound emanating from the woods "back to something *familiar*" (GS 214, LN 107) such as a twig crunching under an animal hoof or leaves rustling in the wind. "*Before* a judgment can be made" about what something is, for example, "*the process of assimilation must already have been completed*" (LN 43) in which a human being is absorbed into a familiar cultural context,

and, by proxy, is therefore subject to the "unconscious domination and guidance by similar grammatical functions" (BGE 217).

We think our thoughts are 'our own' and feel frustrated when we think we can't express ourselves—that it is somehow our own inability to articulate or express things in the right way that is responsible for our feeling of distancing from moral codes and social understandings—even from other people. We fail to see how, in actuality, "knowledge is ossification" and "action is involuntary epilepsy" (E 234) because it is guided by the social dimension of thought: "that a *multitude of persons* seem to participate in all thinking—this is not particularly easy to observe: fundamentally, we are trained in the opposite way, not to think about thinking as we think" (LN 34, my emphasis)—yet it is in fact these social understandings that make our thoughts 'make sense' to us in the first place. Nietzsche explains:

> My idea is clearly that consciousness actually belongs not to man's existence as an individual but rather to the community and herd-aspects of his nature…our thoughts themselves are continually as it were *outvoted* and *translated back* into the herd perspective (GS 213).[57]

From the early 1870's all the way up to late 1880's, Nietzsche is consistent in his assertion about the dialogical[58] nature of language—that it is, at minimum, mutually interdependent with social understanding. We have, for example, Nietzsche's early claim that "it is not true that language is created by need, the need of the individual. If at all, it is created by the need of the whole herd, a tribe…it must want to speak before it speaks, and this will is nothing individual" (E 201). He develops this in an important allegory in the following way:

> If one imagined primal man in the form of a mythical primal being with a hundred heads and feet and hands it would be speaking to itself; and it was not until it realized that it could speak to itself as to a second, third, indeed hundredth being

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that it allowed itself to disintegrate into its parts, the human individuals, because it knew that it could not lose its unity: *for the unity lies not in space as does the multiplicity of these hundred people, but when they speak the mythical monster again feels whole and one* (ibid, my emphasis).

What this means is that the mythical monster of language *speaks us* each time we speak. It even provides the basis for our thinking that it is us who 'speak' or 'have' language—or that we are 'individuals' in the first place. Thus, contrary to the existentialist/Sartrean view of a striving, willful individual that is able to create new tables of values that are radically outside the horizon of cultural norms and mores, for Nietzsche, the social dimension of language ensures that the quest for self-knowledge begins with a hermeneutic situation. That is to say, we do not start from the assumption that we know exactly who we are, what we value, the exact nature of what oppresses us, and so forth, because, for one thing, as social beings we are caught in the noose of language ourselves. "Do you recognize yourself?" he asks—"each of us, even with the best will in the world to *understand* ourselves as individually as possible, 'to know ourselves', will always bring to consciousness precisely that in ourselves which is 'non-individual,' that which is 'average'" (GS 213)—and which, being consistent with the 'herd-aspect' of our nature, will limit our ability to do things like advocate in 'our own' best interest. What is our 'own' best interest, if we have never weighed the question? We "misunderstand ourselves," says Nietzsche, "we misread ourselves" (D 71). But this misreading is not on account of an alienated consciousness or ideological veil which, in a Marxist sense, could be pulled back to reveal the true essence of the human condition along with a structural account of the forces that affect it.

Anticipating the hermeneutic view of language later expressed by Heidegger and Gadamer, that every understanding is necessarily a "misunderstanding," Nietzsche writes,

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"we are necessarily strangers to ourselves, we *have* to misunderstand ourselves" because it is an inextricable part of what it means to be a social being: *"for us the law 'each is furthest from himself' applies to all eternity"* precisely because it is constitutive of sociality (GM 451). "The untruthfulness of man towards himself" is, in this way, a kind of "prerequisite ignorance" that is "necessary in order to exist (oneself—and in society)," to make sense of one's lived experience and to be able to share that experience with others through our social acts and practices (E 153). Moreover, this is a starting point that should not cause fears of political paralysis or a loss individual agency, but should bring to light the more frightening paradox that, everyday and for the most part, the more we talk the more *silent* we become. The agency we may attribute to acts of social resistance or political revolution, for example, may in fact turn out to be modes of what we can describe as 'mobilization *without* emancipation' because they are acts that rely on the background assumptions inherent in particular conceptual frameworks and which *replicate themselves*—unbeknownst to us—throughout the 'new' frameworks by way of our very own actions. Thus, Nietzsche reiterates his claim:

> For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; *it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain.* If we condemn these aberrations and regard ourselves as free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them (UM 76, my emphasis).

For the reevaluator of values (who may herself be a latecomer historically) it may *feel* as if, untethered from past moral codes and guiding values, we are adrift at sea. But as Zarathustra wisely reminds us, "to create new values—not even the lion is capable of that: but to create *freedom for itself for new creation*—that is within the power of the lion" (Z 17, my emphasis).[59]

In other words, while we cannot create entirely new values, we can for the moment rebel against the *oppressive* character of many current ones by realizing they are not truths in themselves, and by dislodging their *ossified* nature from our everyday lives and practices. This resonates strongly to Foucault's approach to the problem of emancipation:

> It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. The political question, to sum up, is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself. Hence the importance of Nietzsche (1980, 133).

Indeed, for Nietzsche this is a pluralistic, perspectival, and most importantly, for my purposes, a *liberational project* that will in fact require an individual to radically question her relation to social mores and normative conventions—to try to demystify them *as* normative. But she will require normative language to critique the concepts themselves and to unravel their impact on her life. She may in fact discover that the socio-historical frameworks she relies on to formulate ideas do not allow her to talk about experiences outside those frameworks, and that the very *thinkability* of such a conclusion also relies, in large part, on those frameworks as well.[60]

Although this seems like an impasse the perspective alone that we gather from this process of questioning can offer us some relief. Seeing, for example, that "'truth' was formerly experienced differently because the lunatic could be considered its mouthpiece" should "make *us* shudder and laugh" (GS 132). And we may even need not go that far, for the act of *taking up* a stance of resistance, of active questioning, has value in itself:

"that a human being resists his whole age, stops it at the gate and demands an accounting—that must exercise an influence!" (133). But for Nietzsche, it can also liberate us in a much deeper sense. If we come to understand that the conceptual frameworks underlying our grammatical arrangements filter out particular modalities of experience—modalities which we may not be able to name on account of the grammatical foreclosure itself—we may at bottom rest assured that our experiences are no less 'real'. He writes:

> That thinking is even a measure of the real—that what cannot be thought *is* not—is the crude non plus ultra of a moralist credulity (trusting in an essential truth-principle at the fundament of things), itself an extravagant assertion contradicted at every moment by our experience. The point is precisely that we can't think anything at all to the extent that it *is*… (LN 77-78).[61]

This insight can be particularly helpful for marginalized, postcolonial subjects, whom Mariana Ortega describes as those beings "who live a life that is in-between because they are multi-cultural, multi-voiced, multiplicitous, because their being is caught in the midst of ambiguities, contradictions, and multiple possibilities" that must be negotiated on a daily basis (2004, 299). It may, for instance, alleviate some of the psychic stress caused by having to inhabit multiple, perhaps conflicting frames of cultural reference, but of being unable to find the words to describe such an experience to those with a less fractured sense of what Charles Taylor calls "our home culture" (1995, 147).

And yet, while this insight can offer a certain measure of relief, the larger problem for marginalized, postcolonial subjects remains the pressing need to find words that can approximate lived experience in the wake of social and political violence, and to communicate this experience to others. That is to say, the problem with articulating

liberational social projects in general and the multiplicitous embodied experience of the

postcolonial subject in particular, is that, as Nietzsche writes, with every account, "one

has to stumble over dead, petrified words, and one will sooner break a leg than a word"

(D 32). [62]Nietzsche explains this predicament in the following way:

> [What] has caused me the greatest trouble and still causes me the greatest trouble: to realize that *what things are called* is unspeakably more important than what they are. The reputation, name, and appearance, the worth, the usual measure and weight of a thing—originally almost always something mistaken and arbitrary, thrown over things like a dress and quite foreign to their nature and even to their skin—has, through the belief in it and its growth from generation to generation, slowly grown onto and into the thing and has become its very body: what started as appearance in the end nearly always becomes essence and *effectively acts* as its essence! (GS 69-70).

The postcolonial subject faces a doubled form of this problem insofar as "what

things are called" is foreign in two ways: first, as Nietzsche describes, and second, as

colonial imposition. Thus, the problem that remains is: how does one articulate new

values that can operate effectively at the level of culture if we are already enmeshed

within a prior cultural background? And what kind of effort does this require on the part

of modern enunciative subjects who are caught at the crossroads of different cultures due

to European colonization? If it is the case, as Nietzsche states in *Twilight of the Idols*,

that, "our true experiences are completely taciturn. They could not be communicated

even if they wanted to be… because the right words for them do no exist," (TI 205) then

how is it possible, as Sarah Kofman asks, "to communicate 'personal' views using a

language which, despite the displacements to which it is subjected, remains common and

vulgarizing?" (1993, 5).

To address these questions we have to look more deeply into the role of the

individual in language. For this, we turn to Nietzsche's third account of language as process-driven, metaphoric activity that addresses the corporeal (Dionysian) dimension of human experience.

III.   Language as Metaphoric Activity

Nietzsche's third view of language serves as an explanatory model for the multiplicity of physiological, bodily forces he believes, along with the social dimension, also exert an influence on human perception. It restores balance to the social view of language by emphasizing the embodied, incarnate aspect of our interpretive lives. Broadly construed, it is a figural and dynamic *process* that links pre-predicative bodily drives or "stimuli" [*Empfindungen*] to linguistic utterances, but in a versatile manner that does not reify reductive notions of language or the body: it merely stresses their interdependence. It incorporates different elements of his views on consciousness, rhetoric, and the body developed during the 1860s and 70s, especially as those views germinated from his studies of nineteenth century physiology, the theory of tropes in ancient rhetoric and classical oratory, and the theory of the unconscious originating in post-Cartesian European thought (and, in particular, in German Romanticism). While Nietzsche's influences are quite diverse, the unique way he integrates these different theoretical elements together leads to a theory of language that, in its most basic form, attempts to account for human understanding—for how one makes sense of their worldly experiences in the context of a *corporeal*, bodily being situated in specific socio-historical circumstances. However, because of its complexity, to better understand

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Nietzsche's metaphoric view of language it is helpful to first expand on this broader, epistemic aspect of Nietzsche's linguistic panorama.

As I have shown in the preceding section, Nietzsche developed an explicit (though unsystematic) account of the social dimension of language. However, he viewed this account as incomplete because it could not attend to the role of the corporeal body in shaping human understanding (D 74). It only disclosed *one* particular modality of human existence, one that required the herd, sociality and the movement of history as pre-conditions for intelligibility. This 'hermeneutic situation,' to use Heidegger's terms again, is true to such an extent that, as Nietzsche acknowledges, "we cease thinking when we no longer want to think within the constraints of language" as a social background (LN 110). The problem, for Nietzsche, is that this background also covers over the unique "penumbra" of individuality he finds to be at the core of each human being (UM 143, D 73), and which he bases on the distinctive manner each individual recodes bodily drives and "nerve impulses" [*Nervenreiz hervorgerufen*] into personal experience (which, for Nietzsche, is always heterogeneous) (RL 21).

Foreshadowing a lacuna in the hermeneutic view of language outlined by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Taylor, Nietzsche's concern is that, under the social interpretation of language, only that which is articulable (from the standpoint of culture and history) can be articulated: beyond that, what cannot be expressed through our social acts and practices (with speech communication being perhaps the most prominent of these practices for Nietzsche) falls to the domain of silence: "Language, it seems, was

invented…only for communicable things," Nietzsche laments (TI 205). This is why

Nietzsche expresses concern that "where words are lacking, we are accustomed to

abandon exact observation because exact thinking there becomes painful; indeed in

earlier times one involuntarily concluded that where the realm of words ceased *the realm*

of existence ceased also" (D 71, emphasis mine). By pointing to the insufficiency of

words to relay experience, Nietzsche is not referring to a view of language as a mere

repository of *glossa*, of words found in a dictionary. Rather, he is referring to the fact

that, as social beings, "one conceives what one is able to name and distinguish" in the

first place (E 20, D145). This puts the embodied, incarnate individual in a peculiar bind

of not being able to give voice to a range of primordial bodily experiences which, strictly

speaking, cannot even show up for her *as* intelligible experiences at the level of speech.

All she has, at best, are vague, unstructured suspicions and a cavernous sense of

inarticulacy that surrounds lived experience. Nietzsche was preoccupied with this idea for

much of his early and middle writings. In a moving account from *Daybreak*, for

example, Nietzsche describes this sense of inarticulacy with the following metaphors:

> The sea lies there pale and glittering, it cannot speak. The sky plays its everlasting silent evening game with red and yellow and green, it cannot speak. The little cliffs and ribbons of rock that run down into the sea as if to find the place where it is most solitary, none of them can speak…my heart swells again: it is startled by a new truth: *it too cannot speak*, it too mocks when the mouth calls something into this beauty….I began to hate speech, to hate even thinking; for do I not hear behind every word the laughter of error, of imagination, of the spirit of delusion? (D 181).

Two things are important here. First, Nietzsche's descriptions of the pale sea, the

colors of the sky, and the rivulets of rock that run into the sea are more than stylistic

flourishes or the indulgence of poetic sensibilities; they point in the direction of

phenomenology—of giving close descriptions of phenomena in the flow of everyday

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life—as a possible resolution to this bind of 'speechlessness' or 'inarticulacy'. But beyond this, the passage also problematizes the adequacy of giving concrete, descriptive accounts of lived experience as *sufficient* for mitigating the effects of inarticulacy on the individual. That is to say, although Nietzsche believed poetry and artistic practice could alleviate some of this suffering (i.e., of 'hating speech') by touching upon certain features of pre-predicative experience, the all-encompassing totality of the social sphere makes it too difficult to self-actualize on the basis of heterogeneous, multiplicitous intuitions drawn from corporeal life. As a consequence, one is left with "a grain of contempt in all speech," mistrustful of speaking, of one's own voice, or of even trying to think through this predicament because of the inevitable limitations placed by grammatical conventions and the social dimension (TI 205). For Nietzsche, this can lead to experiences of alienation, of being a fragmented individual severed from one's bodily attunements. Thus, he writes: "Do you recognize yourself?—this feeling accompanies *every sentence of the speaker,* who is attempting a monologue and dialogue with himself. The less he recognizes himself the more silent he becomes, and in the enforced silence his soul becomes poorer and smaller" (E 200, my emphasis).

Throughout his works, Nietzsche is remarkably consistent in criticizing this 'silencing' aspect of the social sphere[63]. Taken together, all of these remarks express a general concern over the tension between culture and the individual when language is construed simply as social background—as the broader historical discourses that make meaning possible for the individual. To clarify again, because, as a social practice, all spoken language is enmeshed within this historical background, no amount of speech will unravel this framework completely—in fact it makes it impossible to do so if one is to

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speak at all. And yet, rather than describing this predicament neutrally, as one where human beings are simply 'situated' in a particular interpretive context, Nietzsche describes it as one of imprisonment. He explains:

> *In prison*—My eyes, however strong or weak they may be, can see only a certain distance, and it is within the space encompassed by this distance that I live and move, the line of this horizon constitutes my immediate fate, in great things and small, from which I cannot escape. Around every being there is described a similar concentric circle, which has a mid-point and is peculiar to him. Our ears enclose us within a comparable circle, and so does our sense of touch. Now it is by these horizons, within which each of us encloses his senses as if behind prison walls, that we *measure* the world…these again are the basis of all our judgments and 'knowledge'—there is absolutely no escape, no backway or bypath into the *real world!* We sit within our net, we spiders, and whatever we may catch in it, we catch nothing at all except that which allows itself to be caught in precisely *our* net (D73).

In this passage, Nietzsche cites sensory experience, but by this he means the patterned "habits of our senses," or rather their "average" quality that we attribute to our senses through social life, rather than as raw empirical data (ibid). For instance, in saying "our ears enclose us" within a particular "circle" or "horizon" that determines how we make sense of the things we hear (how we "measure the world") in advance of our hearing them, Nietzsche is foreshadowing Heidegger's hermeneutic assertion that "only he who already understands is able to listen" (BT 164). In addition, this passage lends credence to the interpretation of Nietzsche as a hermeneutic philosopher, as it contains the basic principles of what Gadamer describes as an interpretive 'horizon', Heidegger's a hermeneutic 'circle', and Taylor's 'web of meaning'. And yet, it also reveals an important clue for differentiating him from these thinkers and the hermeneutic position (the circle, after all, is a prison!). For Nietzsche, while there in fact exists, "around every being" a hermeneutic "concentric circle" that guides all their interpretations in advance, this circle nonetheless "has a mid-point" that is "peculiar" to the individual herself. This

mid-point is the corporeal body, which, for Nietzsche, also enters into human understanding.

As an aside, in emphasizing the tension between culture and the individual, it might seem as if Nietzsche is here moving in the direction of Habermas, who emphasizes the autonomy of each individual without rejecting the importance of culture. To recall from chapter one, Habermas criticizes Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics precisely because he believes him to be offering an ostensibly restrictive picture of human experience, one where "the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life" (TM 245). Habermas therefore attempts to restore equilibrium between culture and the individual, which he understands in terms of a self-reflective, individual moral agent and the community she belongs to—a community she also depends on for furnishing the normative content of all her propositional speech acts (Habermas 1999, 200).[64]

Despite this similarity, Nietzsche differs significantly from Habermas on many levels, but mainly because he does not commit himself to the reflective powers of consciousness, whether as a solution to this problem or in principle. Instead, he combats the problem of the hermeneutic emphasis on culture (over the individual), not by setting up a new, equally foundational episteme, but by getting underneath it and *radicalizing each component of its basic assumptions*, especially those about the nature of individual experience, consciousness, and the body. Methodologically, his goal is to paint a picture of human existence so multifarious and complex that it becomes nearly impossible to accept the social dimension as the only valid framework for making sense of lived experience—thus opening the way for a new conception of human understanding based

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on metaphorical, interpretive activity, one that incorporates both the social dimension *and* the corporeal self.[65] It is to these assumptions, and to Nietzsche's radicalization of them, that we now turn.

According to Nietzsche, the modern philosophical tradition in the West has operated largely under the Cartesian assumption that a single, unified subject or ego-consciousness lies at the heart of individual experience. The social construction of truth and the subject (especially through conventional, subject-predicate grammatical categories that posit a doer behind every deed) has shown this to be a fiction. However, because this approach of critically appraising human subjectivity is rooted in Nietzsche's larger project of critiquing Western metaphysics, its descriptive terms are mainly negative rather than productive. That is to say, another way to address the same problem positively is to pluralize (rather than destroy) the concept as a type of thought experiment to see what avenues and possibilities are opened up. Thus, seen as a type of perspectival thinking, for Nietzsche, "the assumption of the single subject is perhaps unnecessary; perhaps it is just as permissible to assume a *multiplicity of subjects* on whose interplay and struggle our thinking and consciousness in general is based?"(LN 46). Again, this does not mean, that there exists a one true consciousness that is then multiplied to produce a many-headed subject with multiple extensions of that one, foundational consciousness. Rather, creatively conceiving of "the subject as a multiplicity" allows Nietzsche to radicalize the concept of consciousness itself by introducing the possibility of multiple spheres of knowledge that are also metaphysically discontinuous with one another (ibid). After all, he asks, "why should one not be allowed to *play*

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metaphysically?" especially if we are plagued by inarticulate suspicions that our current conceptual frameworks might conceal other dimensions of lived experience, those that touch upon equally important bodily drives and corporeal intuitions (E 236)?

Following this account, for Nietzsche, the subject is multiplicitous in at least two, very different but interrelated ways: as a corporeal body replete with unique and dynamic physiological drives, and as a heterogeneous 'self' made up of irreducibly diverse psychological forces (or 'consciousnesses') that are always affected, at least to some extent, by those bodily drives. This is what Nietzsche means when he says "there are thus in man as many 'consciousnesses' as—at every moment of his existence—there are beings which constitute his body " (LN 26). On his view, the reason we do not readily interpret ourselves as a multiplicitous subject is that, due to long-standing conceptual orthodoxies in the West, "the distinguishing feature of that 'consciousness' *usually held to be the only one*, the intellect, is precisely that it remains protected and closed off from the immeasurable multiplicity in the experiences of these many consciousnesses" (ibid, my emphasis).[66] In other words, we are accustomed into thinking that there is only one way to think—to measure the weight of our interpretive life via the categories that our socio-historical communities make meaningful in advance, and which we grow into as public, social selves.

Because this type of inculcated, pre-reflective thinking gives shape and import to our daily lives, we do not think to question it, despite contradictions we may encounter at the level of unconscious, bodily experience.[67] That is to say, for Nietzsche, *we are not just public selves*; our corporeal body also enters into our thinking. This is very difficult to

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express through a thought, however, as only those concepts that have already been shaped in some way by the social dimension are accessible to us. This is why knowledge of the body can never be more than a poetic attunement or intuition, and why it registers most powerfully when we are not fully conscious, as in dream life, when "the motions of the blood" or the "nervous stimuli" that "give scope and discharge to our drives" produce a particular kind of "text" we can interpret at a very different level than when we are fully awake (D 75).[68]

For Nietzsche, the unconscious is thus not part of a hierarchical binary (whereby he privileges unconscious over conscious experience) or a foundational truth claim; it only pluralizes a prior conceptual restriction in order to expand the range of possibilities for understanding selfhood—to decalcify a concept rather than set up a new one. To be clear, the problem is not that different, perhaps better modalities of making sense of lived-experience exist (they may or may not)—the problem is that "we are *accustomed* to *exclude* all these unconscious processes from the accounting and to reflect on the preparation for an act *only* to the extent that it is conscious" (D 80).[69] The emphasis is thus on coming to terms with the various hermeneutic restrictions that, for Nietzsche, both sustain and (unduly) limit us as interpretive, human selves. His reasons for seeing this limitation as negative, as we'll see in a moment, comes from his views on the body as a constant source of dynamic, Dionysian influence—a view he weaves into his understanding of language as metaphorical activity.

IV.   Synthesizing Language: Nietzsche and the Hermeneutic Body

Using a theory of tropes drawn from Greek rhetoric and classical oratory,[70] in his 1872-73 lecture course, *Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik*,[71] Nietzsche put forth a view of language as a type of multilayered transference [*Übertragung*] between conscious and unconscious realms of experience. This transference can be understood as a pre-predicative process-driven metaphorical activity that incorporates both unconscious bodily drives and ordinary social understanding. For instance, in this lecture Nietzsche explains that "what is usually called language is actually all "rhetorical figuration" [*rhetorischen Figuren*]; language is *created* by the individual speech artist, but it is *determined* by the fact that the taste of the many makes choices" (RL 25, my emphasis).[72] As we saw already, the 'taste of the many,' or the social, 'herd aspect' of thought, is what gives shape and recognizable meaning to language. It is what brings language out of a state of general inchoateness and allows it to function in ways familiar to us. For Nietzsche, language "discloses" certain features of experience at the expense of others (BT 55), and this disclosure depends on 'the taste of the many'—on the fact that "every kind of culture begins by *veiling* many things" (E 109, my emphasis). To recall, we cannot arbitrarily choose what we want language to express because this is already guided in advance by our historical situation. However, along with spelling out the socio-historical dimension of language, Nietzsche is careful to insist that "to experience" is also "to invent," (D76) meaning that there is always a part of human experience that is not shaped by the hermeneutic situation, but rather is "created by the individual speech artist" (R 25). This is where organic, bodily drives and nervous impulses, which (on

Nietzsche's view) are unique to each individual, come in.

According to Nietzsche, the organic, physical body is the starting point of all human knowledge; it supplies us with a series of nervous impulses that, unbeknownst to us, act as a type of stimulus or "drive" (*Triebe*) that help shape *how* we take in the conceptual schemata given to us by our social backgrounds. On this view, our bodies are a complex constellation of various chemical elements and organic compounds that register their effects uniquely in each individual via their autonomic nervous system, producing a series of 'instinctive' impulses that—like charged positive or negative flows of electrical currents—stamp individual perception with underlying inclinations. This is why, for Nietzsche, all of our moral valuations and pre-reflective interpretive activities are also "a symptom of particular physiological conditions" rooted in the body (LN 96).[73]

However, when this view of the body is not followed by Nietzsche's distinction between the "corporeal body" (*Körper*) and the "lived body" (*Leib*), it often leads to charges of reductivism (or naturalism) as some Nietzsche scholars have claimed.[74] In *The Gay Science*, for example, Nietzsche remarks that "our body after all is nothing but a *social* structure of many souls— *L'effet c'est moi*," and that because of this, "every act of willing is simply a matter of commanding and obeying, based on a social structure of many 'souls'" (GS 19, my emphasis). The body that makes up the lymphatic, endocrine, or nervous system is thus not the body that is 'experienced' at the level of everyday, social understanding. It is a discursive effect that we make sense of on the basis of a larger social structure we are enmeshed in, so that a pain in the middle of our chest might today be understood as (and therefore *felt as*) heartburn, whereas in medieval Europe it might have expressed a misalignment of the soul, for which one sought remedy

through religious council rather than the physician's instruments.[75] This distinction is important on several levels. First, for the purposes of my project, it seems to open up the possibility of a tension or ambiguity in the postcolonial subject's sense of their own embodiment due to rapid cultural shifts and historical ruptures like colonization, which we will return to at the end of this chapter. Second, for Nietzsche, the distinction is also important because it implies that, against the naturalist reading, "the relation of a nervous stimulus to the image produced is inherently *not* a necessary relationship," as it will always be mediated by the social sphere (OTL 249, my emphasis).[76] In a section entitled *Verhältniss des Rhetorischen Zur Sprache* of his lecture on ancient rhetoric, Nietzsche explains:

> Man, who forms language, does not perceive things or events, but only stimuli: he does not communicate sensations [*Empfindungen*], but merely copies of sensations. The sensation, evoked through a nerve impulse, *does not take in the thing itself:* this sensation is presented externally through an image….however, since it is something alien—the sound—how then can something come forth more accurately as an image?….Instead of the thing, the sensation takes in only a sign. That is the *first* aspect: *language is rhetoric*, because it desires to convey only *doxa*, not an *episteme* (RL 22-23, first emphasis mine).

On this reading, although language (as a metaphoric process) begins with nervous impulses, the individual 'language artist' (or speaker) cannot translate these stimuli into meaningful feelings, concepts, or impressions on her own. For this, she must have consciousness. For consciousness she must have language, and for language there must be *context*, beings, history, and so forth (since all conscious thought is always already dialogical). This is why Nietzsche believes "our sensory perceptions are based on *tropes*, not on unconscious conclusions" (E 151), because no direct correspondence between individual perception and nervous stimuli is ever possible. Consequently, for Nietzsche,

"tropes are not just occasionally added to words," he writes, "but constitute their most proper nature" (RL 25). This is why it's metaphor, all the way down, why language is always already set up to convey only *doxa*, opinion, rather than knowledge, *episteme*,[77] and why, for Nietzsche, "there are no 'literal' expressions and *no knowing in the literal sense without metaphor* (E 154).[78]

As Sarah Kofman explains, for Nietzsche, our access to the most basic sensory perceptions are always colored in advanced by a social pre-understanding of those perceptions, so that

> on hearing a foreign language one transposes into the words that one hears familiar sounds which are intimate to the ears; when reading, one guesses more than one reads. One does not *see* a tree, one imagines it lazily without looking at the original details The familiar, which by its repetition passes for necessary, assumes the status of the proper and metaphorically and metonymically transported everywhere—*from one sphere to another, from the conscious to the unconscious, from man to the world, from one specific sphere of activity to another*—through assimilation and generalization which are 'illegitimate', treacherous, and unjust; metaphoricity, by its exercise of sole mastery, implies the loss of individuality and the reduction of differences. It is again to this same unconscious metaphorical activity that man owes his 'truth drive' (1983, 34, my emphasis).

What should not be lost in this account is the fact that, in light of its historical devaluation in the Western philosophical tradition, Nietzsche placed unprecedented emphasis on the *corporeal* body (*Körper*).[79] That is to say, although we have no direct access to it sufficient to ever make propositional truth-claims about it, for Nietzsche, the corporeal body remains the primordial mortar or wellspring behind all human interpretive activity, and this is what he means by 'language is created by the individual speech artist'. It does not mean that language is a propositional act brought about by a willing, intentional, self-reflexive, Cartesian subject (which are all fictions for Nietzsche), but rather that our finite, irreducibly complex corporeal bodies also *contribute* to our

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"individual perspectives" of reality (BGE, preface). For Nietzsche, it is the physiologically attuned *body* rather than the ego cogito, social practices or a hermeneutic horizon that is "to be given methodological priority, *without determining anything about its ultimate significance*" (LN 113, my emphasis). On this view, before there can be interpretations that matter to us in particular ways, there have to be bodies, flesh-and-blood beings *that can live out* those very (socially-constructed) interpretations.

In "Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks" (1873), Nietzsche writes that "Being must be given to us somehow, must be somehow attainable; if it were not so we could not have the concept," but we must not forget that "*esse* basically means 'to breathe'" in the context of incarnate, bodily beings (84). His emphasis on the corporeal body serves to remind us that "what *lives* is being, there is no other being" (LN 56).

Thus, while the social dimension is important for understanding language as a metaphorical, interpretive activity, it is also the case that Nietzsche believed "the physiological process is absolutely necessary" to it (Kofman, 30). As Christian Emden explains, "Nietzsche seems to suggest that, subject to the dynamics of order *and* change, the interpretive assimilation of our cultural and natural environments cannot result from mental processes alone, for our physiological makeup and drives play a role, too" (2005,138). If this is difficult to grasp, one way to understand the role of the body in interpretation is through individual reading practices. That is to say, often, philosophers interested in the history of ideas make the argument (myself included) that understanding the historical backdrop against which a particular thinker's ideas emerged is essential to apprehending the actual content of those ideas. We must find out who a thinker read,

what books were in their library, who their colleagues and teachers were, what schools of thought their teachers subscribed to, the politics of the era, etc., if we are to weave together a rich narrative context to accompany and illuminate their work. We can, for instance, archive books we know Nietzsche read, encountered at school in Pforta or Leipzig, checked out from the Basel municipal library, and therewith make historically-situated claims about the thinkers or ideas Nietzsche was actually responding to in his philosophy.

When carried too far, especially for a philosopher with such a "physical style of thinking," (L 206) what gets lost in this approach is the way in which a philosopher's own body helps interpret what they read—that *how* they read and their bodily attunement is vitally important. For instance, someone stricken with epilepsy or plagued by illness may experience different levels of concentration, sufficient to focus more on a small section or even a single sentence during the course of an hour. In turn, that person may have been more intensely shaped by one (perhaps arbitrary) paragraph from Dostoevsky than from the sections underlined and revisited during periods of better health, which perhaps required less mental effort. How it is that something enters us, what aspect of its character gets encoded in our memory, can be indeterminately varied depending on our individual physical constitutions (which are themselves not static) and historical background. Thus, for Nietzsche, "studying the body gives some idea of the unutterable complication" involved in the question of interpretation and its relation to the body (LN 3)— and it is this complicated relationship that he tries to work out in his theory of language as a metaphoric activity.

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This is what makes Nietzsche's hermeneutical approach to language radically different, specifically his incorporation of individual physiology as a pre-linguistic source of influence. Whether it can be spoken or not, for Nietzsche, "*everything* exerts an influence: the result is man himself" in his complex multiplicity (LN 1). Just because we are unable to name or give a grammatical account of the bodily dimension does not therefore mean that things no longer exert an influence on us, for as Nietzsche writes, "we are bent and tormented worst by invisible hands" (Z 29). That is to say, for Nietzsche, as an interpretive animal, "man *must interpret*, and thereby assess his life and experiences from a specific point of view" rooted in culture and the movement of history (E 219)—this is not in question— but what if it's possible that what is *most* important about our interpretations is *not* the feature which brings them to the threshold of language (as inherited vocabularies) or conscious thought—but an altogether different feature, one that takes the body as the starting point for human knowledge? As Zarathustra teaches, "behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, stands a powerful commander, an unknown wise man—he is called self. He lives in your body, *he is your body*. There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom" (Z 23, my emphasis). Following this wisdom, for Nietzsche, the hermeneutic aspect of language is true but only from the perspective of *conscious* thinking. That is to say, the problem of inarticulacy—of the difficulty one sometimes feels in describing lived experience— rests on 1) the assumption that the sole—or at least, privileged— sphere of language is also the sphere of intelligibility and consciousness (which is always 'collective') and 2) the assumption that selfhood is homogeneous or at least not fractured, disunified, or multiplicitous.

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Nietzsche's disparagement of words therefore coincides with his concern that spoken language only addresses *one particular sphere* or "realm of existence"—the one congruent with the social realm. He disagrees with the conclusion that the limit of one's language is the limit of one's world because it leaves a person with a conflicting sense of their own embodiment: we can acknowledge only the products of our embodiment that can be made intelligible by our socio-historical situation, but on his view there are always going to be residues of meaning, something that eludes and elides this framework. On my view, what Nietzsche affords us with is an acoustic glimmer of this silence, with the idea that its thinkability is perhaps *not* silence itself—that while it does not 'say', perhaps it gestures, indicates towards the subterranean, insists that it is, at the very least '*not nothing*,' and that it must be taken into account when considering the complexity of human experience.

Thus, Nietzsche's view of language as metaphoric activity can be seen as an attempt to meld together both the social and bodily dimension of human experience on the model of an Apollonian-Dionysian reciprocal duality. According to Nietzsche, "Apollo could not live without Dionysus" (BT 27) and vice versa; both "are required to unfold their energies in strict, reciprocal proportion" (116). If we understand the social sphere as the form-giving Apollonian dimension and the Dionysian as the pre-predicative bodily drives that resist stasis, language, in this broadest sense of the term, is constitutive of all human activity precisely because it takes into account both social interpretation *and* bodily interpellation. Specifically, Nietzsche argues "these two very different drives exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking (*reizen*) one another to

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give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them." (BT 14) On my view, it is this dueling, yet complementary exchange that forms the basis what he calls the "primal unity," or the "primordial contradiction that is concealed in all things," and which lies as the heart of human existence (BT 55, 60).

By synthesizing different dimensions of experience, Nietzsche produces a more nuanced and complex model of human communication than traditionally conceived in Western philosophical discourse. Although it shares some points of congruence with Kristeva's notion of the "symbolic" and the "semiotic", Nietzsche's account is built on different (i.e., non-developmental) assumptions about the nature of language. He writes:

> in any case the emergence of language is not a logical affair, and if all the material with which and in which the man of truth, the scientist or the philosopher, later works and builds does not come from cloud-cuckoo-land, neither does it come from the essence of things (OTL 256).

Again, from the outset, the question Nietzsche has been after is the *adequacy* of language to account for the full complexity of human experience— whether, in fact, our social acts and practices can actually account for "all realities" (OTL 255). We see that, whether language is viewed as a critique of metaphysics or as a social background, the answer is always *no* because the corporeal dimension of experience is excluded. This is why Nietzsche thinks that social practices like "language, and the prejudices upon which language is based, are a manifold hindrance to us when we want to explain inner processes and drives: because of the fact, for example, that words really exist only for *superlative* degrees of these processes and drives" (D 71). Nietzsche's view of language as metaphorical activity recognizes the pre-linguistic domain of inarticulacy—understood in terms of the ambiguous, multiplicitous energies and drives of the physiological body—

that underlie and inform our meaningful expressions. It is, for this reason, better equipped at doing justice to the psychic confusion, fragmentation, and dislocation of the postcolonial subject. Although the latter results from inhabiting multiple, yet contradictory *cultural* spaces, the theoretical framework opened up by Nietzsche's views on language create a discursive space capable of answering Mariana Ortega's call "to demand that our thoughts, our theories, our ways of knowing, what fancily we call our epistemologies, do justice to the lives we live" (2008, 238).

Nietzsche argues that language will never render the "precise word," that the very medium of thought sets limits on what one can come to express in words (E 14, GS 148). And yet, he also tells us we must *body forth* nonetheless as incarnate examples of multiplicitous resilience: that we have a right to insist on our words, as words, as ours, as the first and last testament of our bodies, and what our bodies have lived through. And yet, although he avoids reifying the developmental model of language that (on my view) limits the applicability of Kristeva's work for Latin American contexts, Nietzsche faces a different problem. That is to say, there remain questions as to the extent that Nietzsche's insights on language and the multiplicitous nature of the body are able to relate to the particularity of *postcolonial* lives due to his problematic political philosophy, one that might include the sanctioning such oppressive cultural institutions as slavery, or the devaluation of certain social groups on the basis of race, sex, social caste, etc. (Schutte 1984, 162). One might ask whether he is indeed able to reconnect the multiplicitous body *back* to the social realm without his problematic cultural politics.[80]

With this problem in view, I am suggesting a strategic or heuristic reading that focuses not on Nietzsche's problematic cultural politics but on his multiplicitous configuration of selfhood and his conception of language as metaphor, as it is these theoretical strands that can prove helpful when brought together with other aspects of postcolonial theory.[81] In the context of postcolonial Latin America, for instance, one way to reconnect the multiplicitous body back to the concrete social and political demands of everyday life is through Gayatri Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism"[82] (1987, 205), or, alternatively, (as an example of "evaluative" models) by compounding it with "participatory" models of feminist research discussed in chapter two (Schutte 1993).

V.   Conclusion: Responding to the Postcolonial Bind

As I have argued in the preceding chapters, there exists a need for pluralistic theoretical models of human communication that can better accommodate the multivalent and contradictory aspects of postcolonial life. This includes the "multiplicitous" experience of selfhood that is fragmented, split, yet burdened with the need to make politically meaningful claims in communicative contexts that privilege a *cohesive*, stable, narrative self-identity. I have referred to this problem as one feature of 'the postcolonial bind,' describing it (in chapter two) as a multi-tiered problem requiring a plurality of theoretical and practical approaches capable of simultaneously engaging issues of gender, race, cultural difference, and the concrete particularities of social and political life.

To date, this problem has been engaged by the social-scientific discourse of "hybridity," which was developed to help theorize the impact of European colonization in

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Latin American culture, as well as to formulate strategies of resistance to neocolonial forces like neoliberal economic policies and (the more pernicious aspects of) globalization.[83]

As Alfonso de Toro explains, "'hybridity' can be understood within the theory of culture as the strategy that connects ethnic, social and cultural elements of Otherness to a social-political context where power and institutions play a fundamental role" [La 'hibridez' puede ser entendida dentro de la teoría de la cultura como la estrategia que relaciona y conecta elementos étnicos, sociales, y culturales de la Otredad en un contexto politico-cultural donde el poder y las instituciones juegan un papel fundamental] (2006, 17). It can be placed alongside a family of diversifying concepts that include "transculturality [transculturalidad]" or "transtextuality [transtextualidad]" (Welsch 1999) and which recently have been placed under the umbrella of, what de Toro calls, a "transversal science [una ciencia transversal]" of culture (19). According to de Toro, the concept of a transversal science is not static or prescriptive, but rather "offers us instruments for broadening the category of 'hybridity' as a theoretical construction that was lacking to date" [nos ofrece instrumentos para *ampliar* la categoría de la 'hibridez' como una construcción teóretica que hasta la fecha faltaba"] (ibid). To this family of concepts that further augment the theoretical scope of hybridity, I add the concept of "hydricity," or "hydric life."[84]

Through a strategic appropriation of Nietzsche's conception of multiplicitous selfhood and his view of language as metaphorical activity, the concept of hydric life provides a theoretical framework that emphasizes the interdependence of the complex,

pre-predicative affects and drives of the physiological body on the one hand and the socio-historical background that gives meaning to these bodily affects and drives on the other. This view recognizes the fractured, contradictory, and multiplicitous aspects of postcolonial life, but it also holds these divergent and ambiguous aspects together in a meaningful way so that the notion of selfhood can still be applied. Hydricity, as I am envisioning it, opens a discursive space for a self that is both multiplicitous and unified, fragmented and held together. It allows us to recognize that the self is, as Ortega explains, "complex, multiplicitous, ambiguous, and sometimes even contradictory, and that even thought we are multiplicitous, there is still a togetherness to our multiplicity" (2001, 16). Yet, for the postcolonial subject, as for Nietzsche, the experience of being unified and held together is always, at bottom, illusory. Language always begins with the dark and unintelligible drives of one's own experiential body, and these drives are translated and made intelligible by a socio-historical horizon of meaning, *but it is a horizon that is not necessarily one's own*.

In this way, Nietzsche's views on language and selfhood are especially helpful when placed in theoretical interaction with postcolonial thought because they articulate the complex and multivalent notion of selfhood as well as the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in North-South communication (such as the postcolonial subject's attempts to meaningfully express her needs and demands to others in the language of her own oppressors). Moreover, knowing full well that, as Nietzsche writes, "there is no general recipe for how each man is to be helped" (L 23) it is important to note that, while offering new terminology, this project does not attempt to set up a new foundation for

discourse ethics, but simply to *broaden* the range of perspectives and possibilities for thinking about communicative practices, especially with regard to emergent postcolonial and North-South contexts. In this manner, my analysis can be seen as an extension of Spivak's project of "critical historiography" to Latin America, meaning that, in giving an account of the effects of colonialism on Amerindian languages,

> this is not to describe 'the way things really were' or to privilege the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of history. It is, rather, to continue the account of how *one* explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one (1999, 267).

Thus, my aim has not simply been to show the extent to which the forceful imposition of colonial linguistic frameworks affected non-Western cultures, but how it is that the imposition of such frameworks bears on the ability of modern-day postcolonial subjects (especially subaltern women) to give voice to the unique, concrete concerns of lived-experience—concerns with are marked, not just by the multiple intersections of race, class, migratory status and ethnicity, but also by life and death consequences. The challenge for discourse ethics today is to articulate a communicative modality and corresponding theoretical framework that—rather than severing the "rules of discourse" from the "*conditions* of their application"— can be attentive to the historical realities of postcolonial peoples, who still face *subaudible* levels of social, historical, and political oppression.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that European colonization of native Amerindian discursive practices laid the groundwork for conditions of communicative marginalization in intercultural dialogue, particularly when communication takes place between subaltern, multicultural subjects (such as Rigoberta Menchú or Gloria Anzaldúa) and members of dominant, North-American, Anglophone culture. This is because the expressive medium that the multicultural, postcolonial subject relies on for such communication is the result of a *problematic* plurality of cultural traditions that, because they are often conflicting and contradictory, limit her ability to speak and be heard in North-South contexts.

Following the hermeneutic view that language should be understood primarily as a discursive background or horizon of worldly meanings that the subject *tacitly* grows into and becomes familiar with, I have argued that the experience of *discursive familiarity* is problematic for the postcolonial subject because, as suggested in chapter two, she is always precariously positioned 'in between' at least two cultural realities —between the older Amerindian world marked by its own rituals, cultural practices, unique conceptions of gender, class, ethnicity and race, and the new European world that has been forcibly imposed on her by colonialism—and, thus, is not fully *at home* in either

of them. As a result, the postcolonial subject inhabits a unique domain of inarticulacy and psychic dislocation that Homi Bhabha calls a state of "unhomeliness" (1994, 9).

To this end, because the dominant Western philosophic paradigms for understanding selfhood in the modern era have relied on a conception of the self that is unified, stable, coherent, and whose inner workings as a rational mind can be made transparent through introspective reflexivity, subjects whose lived-experience is structured by flux, change, and cultural discontinuity have a sense of selfhood that does not map onto these dominant frameworks. In fact, as I have argued, the multicultural subject feels muted by these frameworks because they do not account for her sense of ruptured subjectivity that comes as a result of being straddled in multiple, yet asymmetrically valued cultural contexts (such as the Anglo, the Mexican, and the Indigenous). It is this constant clash of differently-positioned cultural norms that make lived-experience painful for postcolonial subjects because one is never fully able to engage tacitly or pre-reflectively with one's own worldly context, having to stop frequently to negotiate the various social standards encountered though everyday activities—a situation which I have described through the concept of "discursive liminality".

Along with pointing to colonization processes as a historical source of oppression, in the context of cross-cultural communication, the idea of "discursive liminality" concretizes the psychological aspect of maneuvering between different cultural norms and standards. That is to say, the loss of narrative continuity in the experience of selfhood means that, to maneuver in different cultural contexts (whether successfully or not) one

often has to frequently shift states, thus suffering from a form of psychic restlessness or psychological exertion. In this regard, the experience of being multicultural in the sense I describe is homologous to border-line states of consciousness, where one is neither neatly situated in one state nor the other, but rather finds oneself at the limen, "caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds" one is forced to inhabit due to legacies of conquest and imperialism (Anzaldúa 1987: 42). Giving an account of this problem, as I have done, is thus an important step in pluralizing intercultural discourse ethics because it takes into account the complex positioning of one's voice along with the historical roots of oppression that, owing to European colonization, underlie North-South dialogue.

From a *political* perspective, the problem is that, in the wake of colonialism, this new hybrid, multicultural self has the added burden of reconciling different strands of one's identity at the same time that she is forced to address pressing issues of domination and social violence, which generally require one to speak, make claims, or advocate for particular interests or on a group's behalf. This is particularly difficult if one's voice is constantly under erasure, or if the normative categories in which social and political demands are publicly articulated do not accommodate certain realities or experiences of oppression. The task, then, is to produce bodies of work that can speak to the complex, heterogenous experiences that emerge from postcolonial life, and which help rethink difference and identity in the context of multiple oppressions like race, gender, class, migratory status and ethnicity.

In chapter three, I presented the work of Julia Kristeva (and her concept of "the semiotic" in particular) as providing a theoretical opening for thinking about the complex

experience of selfhood as ruptured rather than stable and unified. Thorough it, I also problematized the hermeneutic notion of 'fusing horizons ' as not maximally suited to capture the embodied sense of alterity, narrative discontinuity and rupture that pervades the subaltern experience. However, I was also careful to point out that the hermeneutic model of language presented in chapter one through the works of Gadamer, Heidegger, and Taylor, is an important theoretical corrective to the subject-object, representational model of language employed in Spanish colonization of Amerindian culture and communicative practices. This practice of highlighting or cultivating some aspects of a philosophical framework while rejecting other aspects is a methodological feature of postcolonial theory in general, because performing social and cultural analyses in regions like Latin America means always wrestling with the historical imprint of European colonization in contemporary life. I refer to this problem as "the postcolonial bind." In this respect, while certain aspects of a theory can help decalcify prejudices and assumptions instituted by colonial history, and which are essential if one is to unravel the imprint left by those assumptions in cultural values, social institutions and public life, the concrete social urgencies and contexts of oppression prevalent to these regions often necessitate social and political frameworks that are not offered—at least in a robust sense—by frameworks like philosophical hermeneutics.

Hence, in the context of Latin American social theory, in which this work is situated, the political and the philosophical are not easily divided. This means that philosophical as well as political questions have served as a motivation for this project. Understanding politics in the Foucauldian sense of power relations, I have explained the

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unique forms of psychic violence and oppression that emerged for the postcolonial

subject, especially women, who, caught in multiple and even incommensurable horizons

of meaning, were unable to articulate their own concrete demands and needs at a time of

great political urgency. Reading first-person accounts of this experience by Amerindian

women such as Rigoberta Manchú attest to the fact that discursive frameworks are never

neutral and value-free but contain tacit power relations that can create serious psychic

conflicts regarding what counts as a 'legitimate' and 'valid' descriptions of lived-

experience. But in a wider sense my project was also motivated by philosophical

concerns regarding the nature of language and meaning-formation in particular and the

concept of selfhood in general. This can be seen in my turn to the philosophic framework

of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Specifically, as a way to resolve some of the problems of discursive liminality,

and echoing Alison Jaggar's (who follows Gayarti Spivak) concern that "what the

subaltern woman needs is a conceptual framework, a language capable of articulating her

injuries, needs and aspirations," (1998,6) I employed what I called, a 'strategic reading'

of Nietzsche's works. I argued that Nietzsche's views of language and lived-experience

address the extent to which communication is always situated in a particular discursive

context—a context that, as I argued, results in a relatively unified and cohesive sense of

self-identity for Westerners— and, at the same time, explores the ways in which

conceptions of meaning and selfhood can be fragmented and multiplicitous. Not only

does this reading of Nietzsche allow us to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions about

the nature of language and meaning (which is helpful in epistemic decolonization

efforts), but it allows us to rethink the conception of selfhood and expressive space to

accommodate the fluid, complex and ambiguous experiences of the postcolonial subject, experiences that often fall outside or between dominant discursive contexts and, consequently, remain functionally 'meaningless.' The concept of what I call "hydric life", as an extension or complement to the discourse of cultural hybridity that arose in twentieth-century Latin American social theory, serves this end.

This is because the account of lived-experience as hydric provides a theoretical framework that recognizes the fractured, contradictory, and multiplicitous aspects of postcolonial life (represented through the hand-like radial fragments at the tubular base/mouth of biological hydras) while at the same time holding these divergent and ambiguous aspects together (represented in the stalk-like base) in a meaningful way so that the notion of selfhood can still be applied at the narrative level. This is key for models of political agency that necessitate a sense of self that, while not a Cartesian subject, can still have a cohesive narrative identity that allows one to speak, act, and make claims on one's own or other's behalf.

With this concept I go far beyond Nietzsche's own philosophical project, applying it, through dialogue with postcolonial theory, to concrete social and historical needs and the particularities of specific regions like Latin America. As a conceptual framework that helps to more robustly theorize the complex experiences of beings marginalized on the basis of multiple oppressions, including historical oppressions like European colonization, it can be seen as a necessary prelude to political change, as well as an example of theorizing from within "the postcolonial bind".

Overall, my goal has not only been to problematize the difficulty in giving voice to the ambiguous and multiplicitous experiences of the postcolonial subject (because she is compelled to give an account of these experiences in the language of her own oppressors, for example); I have also challenged some of the universalizing tendencies of mainstream "discourse ethics." Through the interdisciplinary approaches I have taken, I reinforced the idea that there is no simple solution to this problem that can be arrived at, particularly by adopting some general (i.e. rational) principles. Rather, following in the spirit of theorists like Mariana Ortega (2008), I have argued that the challenge for postcolonial theory is to first and foremost do justice to the embodied confusion and dislocation of the postcolonial subject. My strategic appropriation of Nietzsche, in this regard, is simply one of many possible attempts.

POSTSCRIPT

…why doesn't your poetry
talk to us about dreams, leaves,
the huge volcanoes of your native land?
Come look at the blood in the streets.

-- Pablo Neruda

Sometimes, when someone speaks in the course of everyday life— where that

everyday life cannot settle into a patterned 'everydayness' used to theorize life, and the

structures that disclose it, due to the daily epistemic assaults from extreme poverty,

servitude, illegality, from the forced separation of families and the traumas of forgotten

wars: in short, from a webbed host of material conditions mawing and tearing at the

lining of the bearable, and which make anxiety a *condition* for life —it is often the case

that the resources of linguistic expression available to one fail, painfully. And that

comma between fail and painfully is important because it draws one to the sphere of *lived*

experience that hangs suspended, almost a weight ready to drop, over language.

"And where one did not know how to explain…"

How, then, to negotiate this tension, vertiginous in scope, between

phenomenological life, *in all its ghostly spectralities*, and the boundaries set up by

language? Not just propositional language, whose limitations have at times been

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bypassed by invention, but by the event of language, the language before language that

gives breadth and range to naming as such, and which invokes the very things we name

into being— the question is, how to account for the vaporous aphasia that laps over one's

larynx, that wets every word with the painful inchoateness of a word without a world,

without a home? That there are experiences that slide, elude, elide, verbalization, but that

cannot be left at that—perhaps prostrated before the eternal mystery or 'awe'— when

those experiences are shaped by both tangible oppressions and yet unearthed codes of

subjugation…

What is to be done, I ask, when one does not, cannot explain and yet must

explain? It is a double bind often answered with the call to carefully describe. "To the

things themselves!" says Husserl, "don't think: look!" says Wittgenstein: so I describe. I

describe how Nurjahan Khatun lay quietly besides her cousin, the girls 9 and 13, in a

straw bed in Kashipure, Bangladesh. Perhaps the moonlight filtered lightly through the

broken window of their small bedroom, perhaps not. I describe how a tin cup, tied to end

of a broken broom pole was slowly fished in through the window and held right above

their heads, how the man whose hands at the end of that pole tightened and released as

the cup, filled with hydrochloric acid, poured over their heads like rainfall. Shall I add

sounds to this description? And perhaps he felt himself saying, as the acid filled crevices

that before did not exist on their taut bodies, 'she should not have rebuffed my advances,'

or perhaps he felt very little, as maybe the girls did too from shock: I do not know. I do

not know the way those who did not survive the rainfall *cannot* know, cannot deliver

themselves before an audience and *describe*. John Beverley and Paul Ricoeur remind us

of this problem of representation, of the politics of narrating history when those most affected by it are not alive to narrative, to give their testimony or first-person descriptions. Yet they also remind us, like Lyotard, that "one's responsibility before thought" consists in grappling as much with what elides communication than with what is easily commensurable, that in cases where "what remains to be phrased exceeds what [one]can presently phrase…one must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist" (1988, 13) and that so much of our task today, because we are *privileged* enough to talk about the problem of communication, resides in "finding the (impossible) idiom" for phrasing these differences—for Lyotard, "that is what a philosopher does" (142).

And so yes, I do not know. I do not know the way the Allied 'liberators' of Auschwitz, with their words like "unimaginable," and "unspeakable," could never know just how much "the full essence of things will never be grasped," and yet how much they must be grasped, strangely *acknowledged*, if one is to bear the weight of the unspeakable planked over one's throat. How hurtful the word "unimaginable" is to those who have not imagined, but had to live, and yet, when pressed before a microphone, fall silent (Kofman, 1998, 36-8). *With what language can one express what language does not disclose to express?* It must not have been experienced to begin with. But it was experienced. What was? I cannot explain. A quandary….

"And where one did not know how to explain, one learned…"

--to go on, open mouthed, attempting to describe—despite the fact that by means of

descriptions one is already inscribed—because something more than words depends on it.

Something like what slips out of Amanda Pineda's testimony when she says, with a

coolness that fractures even fault lines, my name in Amanda Pineda… "I'm 36 and have

been married for eighteen years. I've had nine children; only four are left" (Randall,

1981, 81). Something like what Alenka Bermudez approaches, or tries to approach, when

she asks:

> where is the *word* that will fill in for hunger
> and what name can you give to this daily wanting
> how to describe the empty table the abysmal eyes
> …what substantive to use…
> how to name a finger cut off to get the insurance
> what adjective for the holocaust
> in what tense do you conjugate the verb *to kill*
> what predicate what future what pluperfect…(2003, 263)

And is not all this what Sarah Kofman teaches us, the pain accrued to signification

when, to signification, words no longer accrue, *and yet*, as an enunciative subject, one

must still live, must still speak?

> How is it possible to speak, when you feel a 'frenzied desire' to perform an
> impossible task—to convey the experience just as it was, to explain everything to
> the other, when you are seized by a veritable delirium of words—and yet, at the
> same time, it is impossible for you to speak. Impossible, without *choking*
> (Kofman, 38).

And here so many that can will point out the 'perfromative contradiction' involved in

talking about the difficulty of talking, will reduce it to a substrate of logic, forgetting the

herculean labors enunciative subjects often undergo to come back from the very edge of

signification, the razor-thin chances of making it back sane, employable, unmedicated—

forgetting, Sarah Kofman, in the end, took her own life, and on Nietzsche's birthday. We

forget Primo Levi. We forget Paul Celan, and Susan Brison painfully reminds us of this,

that

> those who have survived trauma understand the pull of that solution to their daily Beckettian dilemma—'I can't go on, I must go on'—for on some days the conclusion 'I'll go on' can be reached by neither faith nor reason. How does one go on with a shattered self, with no guarantee of recovery, believing that one will always stay tortured and never feel at home in the world… (2001,66).

Not all 'go on' to make their performative contradiction. I cite here Nietzsche's words to his friend, Gersdorff: "my writings are said to be obscure and unintelligible! I thought that, when one speaks of distress, people in distress will understand" (1969, 126).

But our present historical juncture in the global South, which is penetrated by a bundled network of live nerves that still to this day transmit impulses carried over from the Colonial legacy, dictates that we cannot here leave it at that, at the foothold of a lit beacon, waiting for the wounded to gather. We, who have learned the codes of various tongues, cultural, academic, disciplinary, who have bore witness to both stammering translations of experience and inventive responses to it; we, this party of one, to which I limit my discourse, finds it necessary to clarify, to disinter the subjugated, precisely by showing how murky, difficult, how *complicated* and far from settled things are…that, for instance, it is difficult *enough* for speakers ushered into dominant historical traditions, who have experienced the incoherence of meaning brought on by violence, physical and epistemic, to speak about their experiences: What, then, of the subaltern, the peripheralized subjects of history? What are the psychological effects of violence, when violence shatters cultural frameworks erected on the basis of a *prior* shattering of frameworks? How is the constitution of the speaking subject to be negotiated on the basis of this shattering? How, if in any way, can the canonical frameworks of the Western philosophical tradition respond to the dissonances emerging from post-colonial life?

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If, as Wilfrid Sellars put it, "the aim of philosophizing is to become reflectively at home in the full complexity of the multi-dimensional conceptual system in terms of which we suffer, think, and act," (1975, 295) how can one feel at home in the world if one's own "conceptual system" is not simply 'given' but itself the product of complex constellations of Imperial History? At what point does the layering of dislocative experiences, material strife, social oppression and epistemic trauma, become thick enough, visible enough, to call for a new philosophy? And why does the "unhomely" aspect "that is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition" consistently turn to *literature* as form of recognition? (Bhabha, 1994, 9). Is it because, as Gloria Anzaldúa suggests, "living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create"(1987, 95)? But *whence the need* for *this* modality, for this complex alphabet of survival that holds "art as the only remaining form of existence: because [it is] indissolvable through logic" (Nietzsche, 2009a, 22)? That we are brought to the "saving sorceress" of art, knee-scraped and stitch-mouthed, eyes watering with words only art can interpret, does not lessen the blow of having been cast out of a homeland, forced to search out a new linguistic subsistence: in this respect, there is still accounting to be done. But how to account for this accounting if not within the constrains of history and the grammatical arrangements of language?

"And where one did not know how to explain, one learned to …"

Describe? For some time now, the response to these concerns has been to *describe*

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experience on the basis of a more plural phenomenology, one that does not believe you can bracket out any pre-theorietcal assumptions—that words are always already colored and distorted— and where the descriptions of the phenomenological subject are not meant to unearth (as Husserl had hoped) the structures of consciousness. Moreover, instead of concerning ourselves with the kind of descriptions that are primarily conceptual, we could perhaps gain greater expressive mobility by focusing on descriptions of everyday, practical activities, whose context-dependent nature allows the things we talk about to emerge in ways that are indicative of our complex web of worldly relations. Hence, because there would be no 'getting it *right'* in any description, surely, this mode can better accommodate even the most ghostly contradictions of experience, which might show up in terms of anxiety or awe.

And so I describe the act of putting on socks. That is to say, I describe how a man who washed up on the north side of the Rio Grande, who celebrated his brother's birthday with drink made from home-fermented corn the night before, awoke at dawn the next day and put on his best pants, which were green. How timing the currents of the Rio is essential to bear across it, and how that day, he was fatefully late in his timing, for he delayed his departure, not wanting to leave the house until finding his socks. You see, they were green, and he wanted to make sure his socks matched his pants.

And what does this matter to philosophy, that a man awoke one day wanting to assure his faded green pants matched his socks? That his life weighs less than his corpse, that his corpse means less to philosophy than his 'death'--this should concern us. But it is

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difficult to concern ourselves with, so we are told, what we are not attuned to; that one is able to hear only what one already understands. And perhaps it would matter if this narrative had been inscribed within a narrative that already matters politically, a narrative wherein I describe this man's 'death' by referencing dominant practices of exclusion: race, sex, gender, poverty, and so on—practices that themselves have taken centuries to be acknowledged as exclusionary, and, which many argue (myself included), are still not adequately acknowledged as such. But the possibility that these may be, in fact, only *superlative* degrees and manifestations of other exclusionary practices encoded at the capillary, most apparently 'neutral' and benign levels of culture must also be explored. Here we hear Nietzsche's echo: "I fear we shall not rid ourselves of our belief in God so long as we believe in grammar" (2009d, 170).

In trying to describe our experiences, we may come to the painful realization that "the word itself barely hints: it is the surface of the choppy sea, while the storm rages in the depths" (Nietzsche, 2009a, 15). Hence, 'giving voice' exposes a quandary of its own, for here, *to express*, to 'state thoughts or feelings in words' cannot itself begin to express—to "expectorate" when the "heart is downright congested with aversion and oppression," as Nietzsche says— because words are precisely the problem; they attempt to establish a direct correspondence between names and things when such a correspondence is based on a metaphysical illusion, corroborated, as Nietzsche points out, by language itself. How, then to respond to this predicament "so as not to suffer from staying silent"? (Nietzsche, 1986, 212). Can we hold a suspended coda over the lone musical note which asks: *with what 'language' can one express what language, as*

historical tradition, does not disclose to express? The problem is all too clear: it must not

have been experience*able* to begin with—not, at least, for the purposes of social

understanding and naming.

> But it *was* experienced.
> *What* was?
>> *Account*. *Explain*
> I cannot.

From the subterranean depths of 'dawns that have not yet broken,' Nietzsche's

underground man briefly surfaces from his hiding grounds, into the *Daybreak*, and

whispers:

> " and where one did not know how to explain, one learned *to create*" (1997, 28).

And yet it is this tension between the expressive potential and limitations of

language that brings Alexander Nehamas to conclude "Nietzsche's view is deeply

flawed," for "either language succeeds in describing reality, in which case we can say

some true things about it, or it does not, in which case the best we can do is to remain

silent" (2009a, xxviii). But there lives in the lungs of peripheral peoples and

communities a deep suspicion—a type of 'air hunger' or pleural effusion— that this

epistemic underdeterminism comes at their expense, that silence is a luxury for those

who've *already experienced life as speakers*, whose cultural history already places them

in the main corridors of Alexandrian libraries, on a large desk, poised before a leather-bound book—an encyclopedia— a pen in their hands, 'expansion' on their mind. Silence is not an option for those whose metaphors are not even their own, whose experience of continuity in the flow of everyday life is systematically shattered by multiple levels of epistemic and material violence.

Historically, these experiences of what I call *discursive liminality* have been relegated to the realm of the "unspeakable," the "unsaid," and which gained some level of articulation through the emergent paradigms of drive theory and the unconscious in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but which are largely discounted by the natural sciences today (or usurped within biopsychiatry). We find this legacy, for instance, in Lacan's assertion that madness is a type of communication—an articulative attempt at signification when signification no longer operates within the structures of continuity (Lacan 2004, 68). Dream life is another example, in the sense that "waking life does not have this *freedom* of interpretation possessed by the life of dreams" (Nietzsche, 1997, 75). And so, in a very broad way, I am interested in those weak and distant, foreign decibels one stammers out in response to the net 'waking life' tangles and ensnarls us in; that webbed mesh of codes and historical assumptions that bring us back to land when, in our dry nocturnal madness, we strike out to the darkest seas. I want to speak of this darkness, and how we were forced to hunger for it when the language that things have no longer allowed us to think of it as part of our lived experience. The 'slippage,' the 'gap,' the 'in-between'— the metaphoric resilience against all final accounts of things — are all metonymies for the same experiential sphere. How, then, are we to address this sphere at the philosophic level, without, as earlier mentioned, reifying the conventions of the

Western philosophic tradition?

I begin where I have already gestured—towards Nietzsche, for many reasons, not the least of which concerns "Nietzsche's radical reflection on language," as Foucault puts it (1970, 305). I do so, in large part, since on my view, only with Nietzsche is it impossible to 'choose' Nietzsche, to hold him up as 'the way'—because he would object to any case that begins with the assertion 'only with Nietzsche….'; it is a *methodological* point, a starting point, a point of embarkment that allows me to begin the unraveling, to slowly pull the string from the spool of history while remaining committed to the assumption that "*we are none of us* that which we appear to be in accordance with the states for which alone we have consciousness and words" (1997, 71). Even more importantly, it allows me put forth a strategic vocabulary, an enunciative mode that gives breath to the notion: "everything excessive must be given a voice" (2009a, 20)— everything, that is, that slides or elides signification, from nocturnal drives and bodily affects to the blood on the streets.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Dussel first levied this criticism against communicative ethics in general, and Apel in particular, during a conference organized around the topic "discourse ethics and the philosophy of liberation" in November 25, 1989 in Frankfurt. The papers from this conference have since been published in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's *Ethik und Befreiung* (Aachen: Augustinus-Buchhandlung 1990). See, specifically, Dussel's comments in this volume, "Die Lebensgemeinschaft und die Interpellation der Armen: Die Praxis der Befreiung," 69-96.

[2] Deliberative democratic theories are those which make public discourse, as an idealized form of reasoned communication, central to democratic processes and institutions. They are an alternative to rights-centered, Western liberal democratic frameworks that focus on individual interests, and where individual claims and preferences are expressed through voting mechanisms such as referendum or election. As an alternative to this framework, deliberative theories seek to base the legitimation of political institutions—as well as ensure democratic political ideals like equality and freedom—through consensus and public dialogue rather than private interests. This will involve real-life people engaged in actual, concrete situations, so that the potential for deep disagreement is here mitigated by grounding discussions on forms of deliberation that could, in principle, guarantee equal and fair conditions for conducting conversations, so that all affected by the outcome of deliberations may participate. This egalitarian safeguard, then, becomes *the rules of dialogue* that, owing to their 'impartial' (i.e., rational) nature and their capacity to be made explicit in formal terms, allow decision-making processes to be recognized as free and fair amongst discussants.

[3] Consider, for example, Charles Taylor's hermeneutic claim that, while "cultures are not closed worlds and borrow a lot from each other," it is also the case that "successful borrowing requires a *home culture* in which new ideas are integrated, and without a functioning home culture people are *incapacitated*" (1996, 408, my emphasis). The problem for many postcolonial subjects like Gloria Anzaldúa, who are straddled in between two or more cultural horizons (such as the Anglo, the Latin American, and the indigenous), is that there is no 'functioning home culture' in the robust sense that Taylor describes: "to which collectivity does the daughter of a dark-skinned mother listen to?" Anzaldúa asks (1987:78). Moreover, while I agree with Taylor that all understanding (including self-understanding) takes place against a broader backdrop that allows one to pick out differences in the first place, or to make comparisons and contrasts between the different cultures one inhabits, the problem for multi-ethnic, multi-culural peripheral subjects like Anzaldúa is that European colonialism has made it difficult to neatly differentiate between what is acquired, borrowed, or imposed in that 'broader' cultural backdrop (as the resources of expression by which one comes to terms with these distinctions have themselves been colonized). That means thinking of oneself as 'multicultural' or shifting group identification to suit a particular discursive situation is not as simple a solution as it might first seem, suggesting a need for a conceptual framework that does not relegate large

numbers of the world's inhabitants to a functional state of 'incapacitation', left to wrestle with what Anzaldúa calls, "the agony of inadequacy" (67). It is in this sense that the concept of "Hydric life" can be of assistance, but only as a *critical* term that does not rest on binary oppositions between multi-cultural peoples, and those who are not multi-cultural.

[4] I acknowledge that there are many important theoretical concerns that, due to the limited scope of this project, could not be given due consideration. I would like to touch briefly on just one of these concerns, as it carries a methodological component as well. The question centers on what might be called 'the problem of recovery' or the 'recovery of origins' with respect of Native Amerindian cultures that have been covered-over or destroyed by European colonization. This problem holds that modern-day efforts to interpret and understand the significance of (in our case, Pre-Columbian) cultural practices or artifacts falls apart when considering the loss of the thick contextual backdrop that originally sustained the meaning of those acts and practices. While I acknowledge the interpretive difficulties that arise when engaging pre-colonial cultural contexts, I likewise point out the wide range of stances on this problem, most notably by postcolonial historiographers like Gayatri Spivak, Ranajit Guha, and Homi Bhabha. For this question, I refer the reader to endnote 22. I should like to add that, although a great deal of my argument in this dissertation hinges on empirical knowledge of non-Western world views and in particular, Amerindian languages, my aim is not to present this knowledge in the context of scientific paradigms or as falsifiable truth-claims. My concluding comments in chapter four, which reinforce Spivak's reflections on her own historical project as a counter-hegemonic *practice*, rather than as a way to "describe the way things really were" (1999, 267) are particularly important in this regard.

[5] For the purposes of this work, by 'colonized world' I am referring specifically to regions such as Latin America that were colonized under Western European (i.e., Spanish, French, and Portuguese) rule. Yet it is still possible, under the definition I am suggesting, to be a postcolonial subject outside of Latin America if one is an immigrant from the region or if one is a multi-cultural subject living in borderland regions where two or more cultures (one being Latin American) meet, such as the U.S.-Mexico border. To be clear, I use the term "multi-cultural" in the strong sense of being multiply-positioned in two or more cultural horizons one has to negotiate, as in a self "that is pulled in different directions by norms, practices, beliefs" that arise form being multi-ethnic, multi-racial or "hybrid" in the Latin American context (Ortega 2008, 71). In this regard, I employ the term "multi-cultural" (to characterize postcolonial subjects) in the same way Mariana Ortega defines "multiplicitous subjects", where "multiplicity refers to the existence of two or more cultural and/or racial views/understandings/values, etc., that the individual has to *negotiate*, as Ofelia Schutte puts it" (ibid).

As an important note, Ann Ferguson, responding to Ortega's definition, has argued that "this definition leaves unclear the difference between those born in a country in a subordinate subculture, such as African Americans, and those who move from one geographic location and culture to take residence in another location with a different culture" (2008, 86). What is difficult about my use of the term "postcolonial subject" is that, to a limited extent, it encompasses both aspects of Ferguson's distinction, as in immigrants from Latin America *and* members of a "subordinate subculture". This is because indigenous populations in Latin America are subordinate to the more dominant *mestizo* culture, yet they do not have to move from one geographic location to another in order to be faced with "a new language and new cultural norms" (ibid) they must often negotiate on a daily basis. The best way to clarify this term, then, is to specify what it does *not* account for. In particular, I do not include in the

definition members of subordinate subcultures that reside within dominant groups or cultures in such a way that the dominant culture informs a large "part of a background of intelligibility that makes it possible for us to carry on with our daily affairs" (Ortega 2008, 70). Tiger Woods, to use Ortega's example, is multi-cultural and multi-racial, although he is not marginalized on the basis of class nor does he identify (at least publicly) with African-American culture; instead he is able, due to his robust familiarity with Anglo-American cultural norms and values, to tacitly rely on them for his everyday activities and narrative continuity in his sense of self. This is not to suggest in any way that African-Americans are not oppressed on the basis of race, class, sex, gender, etc., (or that African-Americans do not experience some sense of cultural discontinuity) but that what is involved in part of the definition of "postcolonial" I am suggesting is a sense in which daily life is structured by a significant element of *rupture* or discontinuity due to different cultural norms and standards.

By contrast to English-speaking African-Americans, for instance, Afro-Latin zambos (or *cafuzos*, as in the racial mixture of Amerindian and Afro-descendants from the Atlantic slave trade) often lack the expressive resources of the dominant culture to be able to operate pre-reflectively within it, particularly in Central and South America; Aymara-speaking Afro-Bolivian women are for this reason a paradigmatic example of postcolonial subjects, and who are also subaltern.

Moreover, because identities are never fixed and static and can change over time, my use of the term also carries a gradation component, whereby it is acknowledged that, as Ortega writes, "the longer I have to exist in my new culture/place, the more I might become accustomed to the norms and practices of the dominant group and the more transparent those practices may become, to the point that they may be part and parcel of our everyday experience" (70). For instance, as an immigrant from Latin America from age 11, my degree of comfort and ease with different cultural understandings was radically less than it is now as a Latina academic writing in English and with privileged access to academic culture, and the social standing that accompanies it. Yet, because I often still inhabit social contexts shaped by Latin American cultural practices, there remain ways in which I experience contradictions, tensions, and lapses when faced with everyday, Anglo-American cultural norms and understandings. But while I still suffer a degree of marginalization (particularly in mainstream Anglophone philosophy) as a Latina, I was never, nor am I now, 'subaltern'.

The crucial point to make here, in which I follow Ortega, is a rejection of the idea that this sort of cultural assimilation (whether on a full scale or to a lesser extent) is indeed "natural and inevitable," (71) as such a notion is structured by a developmental model of progress over time. One does not simply 'arrive' and stay within this cultural understanding, as the temporality of postcolonial subjects is not linear on account of having to continually shift –or "travel," as Maria Lugones describes—between different cultural contexts. Finally, a large part of why I was able to learn many of the different social norms and standards of Anglo-American culture is that I spoke Spanish, which, as a European language with certain Western assumptions built-in (such as subject-predicate grammar, exclusionary subject-object dualisms, etc.) provided many points of compatibility and reference. What, then, of native Amerindian speakers whose languages are structured by very different hermeneutic horizons? What of the violations of those horizons by European colonialism? Although I take up this question in chapter two with respect to native Amerindian languages, the question of how the hermeneutic horizon of Afro-decedents was also shattered, in addition to the Amerindian, is an added layer of complexity that needs to be taken into account, but which exceeds the present scope of this work.

[6] It is important to note that more recent Continental views of language (post 1960), which inherit many of the basic features of hermeneutic thought, are generally more heterogeneous

and shaped by multiple philosophic traditions, most notably structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction and post-modernism. This diversity of viewpoints means that it is altogether possible to be a Continental thinker and not employ, what I have been calling, a "Continental view of language." A Continental thinker shaped by hermeneutic thought, for example, may still retain a reductive, structural view of language that relies on a universal conception of reason, as is the case of the critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas. Thinkers situated within post-modern traditions can also fall within this framework, as Roland Barthes' 'new criticism' or Roman Jakobson's structural linguistics show.

[7] As Jill Buroker explains, Descartes' influence in this tradition can be seen, specifically, "in the view that thought is prior to language, that words are merely external, conventional sings of independent, private mental states. On this view, strictly speaking, linguistic utterances signify the thoughts occurring in the speaker's mind. Although the association between words and ideas is conventional and thus arbitrary, language can signify thought insofar as both are articulated systems: there is a correlation between the structure of a complex linguistic expression and the natural structure of the ideas it expresses" (1996, xxiii).

[8] By the term 'text,' Gadamer does not mean simply logographic, written artifacts. For him, "'text' must be understood as a hermeneutical concept. This implies that the text is not regarded from the perspective of grammar and linguistics, and as divorced from any content that they might have; that is, that it is not to be viewed as an end product the production of which is the object of an analysis whose intent is to explain the mechanism that allows language as such to function at all. From the hermeneutical standpoint…the text is a mere intermediate product [*Zwischenprodukt*], a phase in the event of understanding" that coincides with interpreting worldly contexts, acts, and practices" (1986, 389).

[9] The view of language as providing "finite means" for "infinite possibilities" of linguistic expression comes from Wilhelm von Humboldt, whom Chomsky also credits, not without controversy, with an instrumental view of language. The actual passage from Humboldt's *On Language* reads as follows: "but the procedure of language is not simply one whereby a single phenomenon comes about; it must simultaneously open up the possibility of producing an indefinable host of such phenomena, and under all the conditions that thought prescribes. For language is quite peculiarly confronted by an unending and truly boundless domain, the essence of all that can be thought. It must therefore make infinite employment of finite means, and is able to do so through the power which produces identity of language and thought. But this also necessarily implies that language should exert its effect in *two directions at once, in that it first proceeds outwards to the utterance, but then also back again to the powers that engender it*" (2000, 91, my emphasis).

[10] The claim here is certainly not universal—that all philosophers of language in this tradition subscribe to the precepts of Chomskian generative grammar—or meant to gloss over the important differences between them; it merely draws on the assertion of a common conceptual heritage drawn from the rise of scientific objectivism in modern thought. The much stronger claim, as Chris Lawn argues in his comparative analysis of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Ludwig Wittgenstein, is that "philosophy of language is disguised philosophy of mind. The analytic philosopher's interest in language is not to language for its own sake but in its capacity to expose the various dimensions of the mind" (9).

[11] In *On the Distinction between Poetic and Communicative Uses of Language* (1985), Jürgen

Habermas draws such a distinction in support of (John Searle's interpretation of) John Austin's speech-act theory, criticizing Jacques Derrida's attempt to call "the usual distinctions between serious and simulated, literal and metaphorical, everyday and fictional, and customary and parasitic modes of speech" into question (384). For Habermas, the attempt to collapse these boundaries "dulls the sword of the critique of reason" and opens the floodgate for misunderstandings between speakers, as well as—perhaps more importantly— for coercive acts of speech communication (where an interlocutor is 'tricked' into agreement based on manipulated or distortive language) (399). To be more specific, the worry, on Habermas' account, is that saying things like "I promise" in a poem or a play effectively neutralizes what Austin calls the "illocutionary" aspect of the speech-act—it's ability to function as such, as a 'real' promise that guarantees to other social actors the validity contained in the performance of that utterance. Without this guarantee, language can have little 'action-coordinating' effects between speakers and can pose a threat to the emancipatory capacity of critical reason against ideology. The distinction must be made because, at day's end, one cannot pose a counterfactual to a poem, nor beg a reason from a song. As we'll see in chapter two, this distinction between figural and literal language did not exist in Amerindian languages, and was instead imported from the West.

[12] For Descartes, "reason is a universal instrument" that can guide us to epistemic certainty, provided one makes "a firm and constant resolution not even once to fail to observe" a finite set of rules of discovery; it is "the strict adherence to these few precepts"—to method—that underlies infallible knowledge for Descartes (*Discourse on Method* II, 18-19). The universal character of method renders the world, as a possible domain of knowledge, transparent, for, as limited, finite beings we can nonetheless inquire into "all the things that can fall within human knowledge" in such a way that "there cannot be any [truths] that are so remote that they are not eventually reached nor so hidden that they are not discoverable" by us (ibid). Under this view, individuals, and not the language they tacitly employ, are in control. Consider, for example, Leibniz' position in *The Art of Discovery* (1685) that language "is the greatest instrument of reason," that "the only way to rectify our reasonings is to make them as tangible as those of the mathematicians, so that we can find our error at a glance, *and when there are disputes among persons, we can simply say: Let us calculate* (*calculemus*), *without further ado, to see who is right*" (1951, 50). In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer critiques this notion of calculative method as providing the infallible foundation for truth (i.e., by rendering its acquisition a matter of objective procedures and rational principles). For Gadamer, what is at stake between these two traditions of viewing language is the way in which (1) language and knowledge are related and (2) how that relation informs our understanding of our life-world and lived experience (*Erleibnis*). As Gadamer explains: "That the ideal of scientific knowledge, which modern science follows, came out of the model of nature as mathematically ordered (a model that was first developed by Galileo in his mechanics) meant that the linguistic interpretation of the world, that is, the experience of the world that is linguistically sedimented in the lived-world, no longer formed the point of departure and the point of reference for the formulation of questions or the desire of knowledge; rather, it means that the essence of science was constituted by that which could be accounted for, or analyzed by, rational laws" (1986, 385).

[13] Man, then, is a being that has language, not as a tool, but as a basic condition for their nature. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger explains: "Man is said to have language by nature. It is held that man, in distinction from plant and animal, is the living being capable of speech. This statement does not mean only that, along with other faculties, man also possesses the faculty of speech. It means to say that only speech enables man to be the living being he is as

man" (187). To put it otherwise: "where there is understanding, there is not translation but speech" (TM, 386). That is to say, when things (including us) present themselves "as" the kinds of things that they/we are, understanding has already taken place; to try and point to language as 'discoverable' is to somehow try and stand outside of it, and this, in turn, would be to try and 'step out' of our hermeneutic situation. Again, any experience we undergo is always *already* colored by a hermeneutic situation— a socio-historical, cultural, and linguistic context that is bound up with lived experience (*Erlebnis*) and provides the background for intelligibility, for 'making sense' of things. Thus, we begin to differentiate hermeneutic conversation from instrumental conversation by first recognizing that it is on the basis of being thrown (*geworfen*) into a shared situation that human beings *make sense* of things through being routinely engaged in familiar, public practices, rituals, and institutions. This shared situation allows things to "emerge-into-being" *as such*, including things like 'speaking' itself, so that conversations (even a simple question-answer exchange) *are already complex cultural practices* rooted in particular traditions.

[14] As Taylor explains, "Something is expressed when it is embodied in such a way as to be made manifest. And 'manifest' must be taken here in the strong sense. Something is made manifest when it is directly available for all to see," which is different from "when there are just signs of its presence" or when we can "infer that [something] is there," like when you infer that "you are in your office because your car being parked outside" (1985, 219).

[15] It is important to note that when we understand spoken conversation from the hermeneutic perspective, a number of crucial implications for interpersonal dialogue arise. The first is the possibility that certain forms of 'conversation,' by virtue of the matter at hand, are going to constrain or limit the genuineness of the conversation. On Gadamer's view, "the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner" (TM, 385). Business negotiations and conversations one has with a therapist are two such examples. In a business negotiation, the conversation is limited by the objective aims and partial interests of the speakers: one listens in order to find a way to negotiate or undermine the appeals of the other in favor of one's own interests. In a therapeutic setting, such as a patient speaking to their psychotherapist, what can count as talk is guided in advance by the diagnostic paradigm used to frame the therapist's questions. What the patient can say in response is thus limited, not only on account of the question asked, but on account that the therapist is not really listening openly, but only fishes for a diagnosis in the patient's descriptions. The second important implication, already suggested above, is the possibility that the person with whom one is conversing can always be 'right' in his or her opinions, that "what is to be grasped is the *substantive rightness* of his [or her] opinions" (387, emphasis added). Because *both* speakers come into the conversation with background prejudices and assumptions (without which, both would be at a loss of what to say), "the important thing [in conversation] is to be aware of one's own bias" so that what the other has to say "can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (271-72). In a well-known passage, Gadamer insists: "we cannot stick blindly to our own fore-meaning about the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another…All that is asked is that we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text" (271). The extent and nature of this 'openness' towards the (culturally different) Other will be critically engaged in chapter three.

[16] In order to differentiate between objective propositional statements (which correspond to objective states of affairs in the empirical world) and subjective ones like moods or personal tastes, Habermas subdivides the linguistically-constituted realm of experience into three

'worlds'. Using Karl Popper's terms, he calls them: "1. The objective world (as the totality of all entities about which true statements are possible); 2. The social world (as the totality of all legitimately regulated interpersonal relations); 3. The subjective world (as the totality of the experiences of the speaker to which he has privileged access)" (1984, 100).

[17] Habermas' philosophic program of "universal pragmatics" is thus based on the universal character of the (structural) *forms* of rule-based argumentation and not on any claim of the universal validity of cultural norms and standards. For Habermas, "the circle of intersubjective recognition that forms around cultural values does not yet in any way imply a claim that they would meet with general assent within a culture, not to mention universal assent" (1984, 20).

[18] For his part, Habermas cannot accept, as Guignon explains that, "the prior articulation of the world in language is so all-encompassing that there is no exit from the maze of language. We cannot encounter a world as it is in itself, untouched by the constituting activity of linguistic schematizations" (1986, 119) the same way Gadamer, by is own admission, cannot disentangle himself from the "romantic tradition of the humanities and its humanistic heritage" that help situate his philosophical perspective and positions (1983, 381).

[19] He continues: "I [have] become acutely aware of just how much I am caught up, one might say, in the tradition of German Romantic and post-Romantic philosophy. I live, as it were, in a closed horizon of problems and lines of questioning, which still understands itself to be philosophy, and which recognizes neither a social-scientific nor a skeptical questioning of philosophy itself" (ibid).

[20] See also her influential "Feminism and Hermeneutics," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 8 no.1 (winter 1993): 81-98 and "Discourse Ethics and Feminist Dilemmas of Difference," in *Feminist Readings of Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*, ed. Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995): 247-261.

[21] The term predates Warnke's use; for other uses see, for example, Nancy Theriot, "The Politics of Meaning-Making: Feminist Hermeneutics, Language, and Culture" in *Sexual Politics and Popular Culture,* ed. Diane Raymond (Bowling Green State University Press, 1990): 3-14, and *Feminist Hermeneutics: Papers presented at the Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics Workshop in Bangalore, India*, eds. Lalrinawmi Ralte and Evangelne Anderson (ISPCK, 2002).

[22] There is a great amount of contention regarding the degree to which Pre-Columbian thought and traditions, despite colonization, still exist. Angel Rama, for instance, holds that European colonization did not prevent many aspects of indigenous cultures "from surviving quietly to infiltrate the conquering culture later," (1996, 2), and Walter Mignolo bases a more robust account of cultural resilience on the oral quality of native Amerindian culture, holding that, due to paratactic and polysemous qualities, "oral language and orality cannot be suppressed" (1989, 65). A hermeneutic perspective challenges this notion of 'surviving fragments' insofar as the background web of shared social practices that gave *meaning* to those fragments is irretrievably gone through colonization, and so, like armless Greek statutes in metropolitan museums, indigenous practices apart from their contexts are simply just pottery shards in *anthropology collections*, or rain dances in *gymnasiums*. These 'fragments' make sense in Western terms (e.g., as ethnohistories or displays of multiculturalism in social-democratic societies) and cannot call up their original contexts of use. I take a middle approach. First, I argue that the assumption modern Amerindians simply 'grew' into a Western understanding of being (by

virtue, for example, of speaking Spanish) is misguided (there are over 40 million peoples in the Americas that still speak native languages)—that in fact, these practices were inscribed by *force,* were traumatic on physical and epistemic levels, and as a consequence did not neatly settle into an unproblematic, 'ongoing historical tradition'. Second, while the monolithic effects of colonialism cannot be denied on many levels (social, political, institutional, etc.,), the amount of Pre-Columbian cultural 'fragments' that exist number to such a great extent they themselves, over time, have formed a backdrop against which postcolonial life makes sense (or against which postcolonials make sense of their worldly experiences). The consequence should be clear: postcolonials often dwell "in a constant state of mental *nepantilism*" or *in-between-ness* that cannot be adequately articulated or expressed because their resources of expression have also been colonized (Anzaldúa 1987, 100).

[23] Feminists committed to a physicalist or materialist interpretation of the body as the primary basis for understanding women's oppression, generally speaking, find it difficult to accept Butler's account of the subject out of fear of reducing the gendered victim of battery, poverty, rape, illiteracy and discrimination to a mere 'discursive effect' disconnected from bodily harm. Without necessarily relying on materialist commitments, the question of how one would practically go about petitioning for political rights on the basis of an absent body, or worse, a 'rhetorically-constructed body' undergirds some feminists' larger concerns (Bordo 1992).

[24] We should be reminded of the ways in which philosophers in the Continental philosophic tradition have also used difficult prose, yet with perhaps less resistance; Heidegger, for instance, makes the memorable claim that "with regard to the awkwardness and 'inelegance' of expression in the analyses to come, we may remark that it is one thing to give a report in which we talk about *entities*, but another to grasp entities in their Being. *For the latter task we lack not only most of the words but, above all, the 'grammar'* (1967, 39, my emphasis).

[25] Irene Silverblatt and Jorge Klor De Alva have given similar examples of mimicry and misappropriation as a form of contact-era indigenous resistance in the Americas (2004; 1992).

[26] Hélène Cixous has also echoed this position, arguing that a "woman must put herself into the text --as into the world and into history --*by her own movement*. The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny… writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (1975, 33).

[27] What this example does not address, however, is that problems of social violence often involve *multiple* oppressions marked by complex intersections of racial, sexual, and linguistic vulnerabilities, but which may not be readily articulable at the level of official culture. In a culturally asymmetrical speaking situation, indigenous women's voices may be put under erasure in ways that cannot be easily accounted for through traditional frameworks of understanding social oppression. Consequently, solutions and collective practices for social change may emerge which, because they do not speak to or address these complex issues, prove ineffective or, in the long run, reify neo-colonial practices of exclusion, especially towards women and other marginalized groups. Part of the answer, then, involves increased attentiveness to both the powerful asymmetries that exist between differently situated speakers in culture as well as to how those differences are shaped by history.

[28] Bernstein's alternative, I find, is equally problematic or unhelpful for colonial situations, as it simply gestures towards Habermas' concern for removing all forms of oppression and domination from discursive situations. He writes: "Gadamer sometimes writes as if it is always possible to engage in undistorted dialogue. But here I think Habermas has been much more realistic and penetrating about 'systematically distorted communication' … it is Habermas who stresses the social and political conditions that are required if we are to engage in the type of hermeneutical understanding of different cultures" (39). The lacunae here is that even if the social and political conditions for freely performing criticizable utterances are secured, many modern Amerindians must still use the alphabet to communicate their needs, wants, and desires. Of course, Habermas' point is that what secures equitable dialogue are not words, their syntax, or even the morphemes that comprise them; what secures equitable dialogue are the structures of rationality he believes to be *implicit in* the argumentative structures of communicative utterances. Form this, it follows that for Habermas, intercultural communication is always (at least in principle) possible because "adult members of primitive tribal societies can acquire basically the same formal operations as the members of modern societies, even though the higher-level competences appear less frequently and more selectively in them" (1984,44-5).

[29] Other influences include George Balandier's seminal article, "La Situation Coloniale: Approche Théorique," *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, ix, 1951: 44-79, as well as Edmundo O'Gorman's *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1961) and Leopoldo Zea's *Discurso desde la marginación y la barbarie* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1988).

[30] In the 1492 original: "cuando bien conmigo pienso muy esclarecida Reina: y pongo delante los ojos el antigüedad de todas las cosas: que para nuestra recordación y memoria quedaron escritas: una cosa hallo y saco por conclusion muy cierta: *que siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio*: y de tal manera lo siguió: que juntamente comenzaron, crecieron, y florecieron, y después junta fue la caída de entrambos y dejadas agora las cosas muy antiguas que apenas tenemos una imagen y sombra de la verdad".

[31] Although he also draws from historical linguistics, Mignolo puts forth a concept of language that is broader than Western semantic theory. He writes: "Amerindian languages are also tied up with territoriality, if by territoriality we understand *a sense of being and belonging* beyond the administrative and legal apparatus by which the land is owned by a handful of people…[rather] it is *in* and *by* language that territories are created (or invented) ... recent investigation on the ethnography of speaking has shown that the customs and traditions of communities are imbedded in their own linguistic tradition" (1995, 66-7, my emphasis).

[32] Interestingly, Hegel bestows a more privileged cognitive status to blacks than native Amerindians: "the weakness of the American physique was a chief reason for bringing the negroes to America, to employ their labor in the work that had to be done in the New World; for the negroes are far more susceptible to European culture than the Indians, and an English traveler has adduced instances of negroes having become competent clergymen, medical men, etc., while only a single native was known to him whose intellect was sufficiently developed to enable him to study, but who had died soon after beginning, through excessive brandy-drinking" (82). One reason for this may have to do with the long history of cultural contact with Africans through the Northern centers of classical learning, like Alexandria. Despite this, as is well known, Hegel does not credit Africans with 'history' proper.

[33] The Spanish chronicler Tomás de Torquemada (1420-1498), for instance, observed that "one of the things which causes the most confusion in a republic and which greatly perplexes those who wish to discuss its causes, is the lack of precision with which they consider their history; for if history is an account of events which are true and actually happened and those who witnessed them and learned about them neglected to preserve the memory of them, it will require an effort to write them down after they have happened, and he who wishes to do so will grope in the dark if he tries, for he may spend all his life collating the version which he is told only to find that at the end of it he still has not unraveled the truth. This (or something like this) is what happens in this history of New Spain, for *just as the ancient inhabitants did not have letters, or were even familiar with them, so they neither left records of their history*" (qtd. in Mignolo 1989, 76, my emphasis).

[34] This is not to be confused with noun substitution based on social categories or secondary meanings, such as using the noun "pauper" in a sentence to substitute for the meaning "one who is a very poor person or without means". There are simply no absolute nouns in Nahuatl.

[35] This is different, as Maffie explains, from "Zoroastrian and Manichean-style dualisms," which see the binaries such as light/dark, life/death as "mutually contradictory", or supplant them with the idea that "at the end of history, one or the other…will or ought to defeat" the other. Under Nepantla processes, Nahua dualisms "alternate endlessly and interdependently without resolution," as "it rejects as foolish the ideas that life is inherently good and that death is inherently evil…it rejects as equally foolish the quest for eternal life" (15).

[36] Moreover, it might be argued that because members of religious orders, in the early period of colonization, held possession of the instruments of teaching alphabetic literacy, native Amerindians could not themselves appropriate these instruments in their particular contexts of use, as "the Synod of 1555 formally forbade the ordination of mestizos, Indians, and negroes" into religious orders (Abbot 1996, 43). Joan Rappaport extends this concern by arguing "mnemonics gave way to alphabetic literacy, not because the latter was [morally and epistemelogically] superior, but because its inception in America was accompanied by the spread of *legal ideology*, born of *colonial domination* and carried by the written word" (2004, 286).

[37] A striking example comes from the vast number of supplicant letters sent to King Philip II; one such letter, written by council members in the Nahua town of Huejotzingo, pleads for intervention form the abuses of local Spanish authorities: "Our Lord sovereign, you the king don Felipe…may you hear these our words…so that you will exercise on us your rulership to console us and aid us in [this trouble] with which daily we weep and are sad. We are afflicted and sore pressed, and your town and city of Huejtozingo is as if it is about to disappear and be destroyed…[the old governor] told us many times he would help us and inform you of all the ways in which we have aided and served you…But perhaps before you he forgot us. How then shall we speak? We did not reach you, we were not given audience before you. Who then will speak for us? Unfortunate are we. Therefore now we place ourselves before you, our sovereign lord...your poor vassals who bow down humbly to you from afar…(157-58)." Consider now, to return to our earlier example, Rigoberta Menchú's plea for intervention, and her attempt to give an account of violence against her community five centuries later: "In Guatemala, this is what happens with the poor, especially Indians...The Indian can't speak up for what he wants...There is what we call the mayor who represents the authorities which administer justice when they

say someone has broken the law…to see the mayor you have to get witnesses, sign papers and give him a *mordida* [bribe] so he will support your case. To see the 'governor' you need not only witnesses from the village, and money, but also lawyers or other intermediaries to talk for you…as he'll only believe something if a lawyer or educated person says it…the most distressing thing for us was not being able to speak" (103-110).

[38] In this respect, Foucauldian analyses of culture have been particularly helpful in Latin America for their ability to speak to "the historical contents that have been buried and disguised" by the "established regimes of thought," regimes which range from Eurocentric interpretive frameworks to neoliberal economic practices and globalization (1980, 81).

[39] See Caryl Emerson's *Rethinking Bakhtin* (1997) and *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (2000). While many Bakhtin scholars cite Todorov alone, by and large, most Kristeva scholars describe a simultaneous or 'co-introduction' to Western audiences.

[40] A notable exception concerns Toril Moi's references to Bakhtin, which, although brief and passing, are stronger than most: "Kristeva's own linguistic and psycho-linguistic work in the late 1960's and early 1970's can be said to be produced as a result of her active dialogue with Bakhtin's texts" (1997, 34).

[41] Responding to Ross Guberman's question as to which of her works has been the most personally and intellectually rewarding, Kristeva cites her autobiographical novel, *The Old Man and The Wolves*, as the most influential. The book left a "deep impression" on Kristeva "because it enabled me to reveal a part of the secret of my profound debt to my father and to suffering in Bulgaria" (1996, 238). As for the reference to religion as an expression of "a small space of freedom," Kristeva is most likely referring to the repression of Eastern Orthodox culture during communist rule—a repression whose antithesis shows up in her own work through a psychoanalytically-inflected interest in Byzantine religious art, architecture, and Renaissance paintings (see "Giotto's Joy" and "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" in *Desire and Language*).

[42] According to Bakhtin, the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais typifies the breach of carnivalesque discourse into traditional literary discourse by utilizing grotesque realism, sexual puns and highly unconventional syntax. Kafka's absurdist narratives or Dostoevsky's multi-voiced, deeply layered character structure are also examples.

[43] Some critics, like Patricia Yaeger, would perhaps disagree with this claim, emphasizing instead Bakhtin's early Kantian influences and his 'philosophy of action'. She argues, for example, that "for Bakhtin the source of unrest within the subject does not come from the unconscious, from the drives, from repression, or even from a revised Hegelian negativity, as it does for Kristeva, but from the communicative revision of consciousness itself, *through the self's capacity to see other languages 'through the eyes of another language'*" (1986, 252, my emphasis). I think Bakhtin moves significantly away from this notion in his later works. In my opinion, his early interest in Kantianism was due in part to intellectual restrictions on any kind of idealist philosophy in Stalinist Russia. This is well documented by Bakhtin scholars like Michael Holquist. Another problem, for both Yaeger and myself, is that the working conditions under which Bakhtin wrote made it difficult, if not impossible for him to sustain the development of his ideas in a more unified manner, one that, while not advocating pure 'systematization,' would have given his audience a chance to see his heterodox and novel

synthesis of different intellectual traditions worked out more robustly. Finally, there is what Caryl Emerson and Sue Vice have called 'the problem of the canon'— the fact that not all of Bakhtin's works currently attributed to him may be his. Despite this, I find strong evidence for this comparison in Bakhtin's concept of language as "dialogized heteroglossia" and the supporting descriptions of carnival as capable of producing a plurality of meanings (heteroglossia).

[44] A major shortcoming of this translation, as Kelly Oliver points out, is the lack of disambiguation between *the* Symbolic and the symbolic *modality* within the Symbolic (1993, 9).

[45] This 'unfinishedness' can bee seen, again, as a Bakhtinian inflection into psychoanalytic theory.

[46] Kristeva views this struggle between conscious and unconscious forces as the key element of Freudian drive theory. In a Hegelian interpretation, Kristeva insists that "what interests us is the materialist dialectic he thereby establishes, hence the heteronomy of drives—not their dichotomy" because these struggles and tensions are *productive*; that is to say, the "repeated scissions" and "successive shocks of drive activity produce the signifying function" as such (1984, 167).

[47] The term 'Symoblic' to designate a kind of social structure comes from Lévi-Strauss (1949, 1951), and is taken up by Lacan.

[48] Oliver refers to this two-fold approach as "Kristeva's double strategy for bringing the speaking body back into structuralism: putting symbolic logic within the body, and putting semiotic bodily drives within the Symbolic" (1993, 4).

[49] Kristeva goes on to claim that the oscillating symbiosis between the semiotic and the symbolic can be seen in modern genetic theory. It can be "represented," in other words, "in the configuration of the DNA and RNA molecule as a tetrad or as a double helix, as the configuration of the DNA and RNA molecule makes the semiotized body a place of permanent scission" (27).

[50] For some scholars, there are possible reservations about relying on ideas imported from outside Latin America to address problems brought about, historically, by the very importation of non-Amerindian conceptual frameworks into Latin America. In fact, one of the main concerns throughout twentieth century liberation movements was to weigh the impact of European social, economic, and political frameworks in Latin American culture, often resulting in the rejection of these frameworks in favor of a cultural identification with a Pre-Columbian or indigenous heritage. In 1979, for example, the Nicaraguan *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) called for a "revolution in culture" alongside strategic armed revolt, arguing for the need to "rescue progressive intellectuals and their works" from a kind of Western, "neo-colonial penetration in our culture" (cited in Marcus 1985, 16-17). The irony, of course, is that in this effort liberation fronts frequently employed totalizing notions of cultural identity to fit a desired identification with the party vanguard (Schutte 1993). In this particular case, Nietzsche's anti-essentialist conceptual framework can be seen as a positive counterthrust to essentialist identity politics in Latin America.

[51] See, for example, Benigno Trigo's *Foucault in Latin America: Appropriations and Deployments of Discursive Analysis* (Routledge, 2001).

[52] I have used the following abbreviations for referencing Nietzsche's texts: A = The Antichrist, BT = The Birth of Tragedy, D = Daybreak, E = Writings from the Early Notebooks, EH = Ecce Homo, GM = The Genealogy of Morals, GS= The Gay Science, HH = Human, All Too Human, L = Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche, LN = Writings from the Late Notebooks, OTL = On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense, PT = On the Pathos of Truth, RL= Lectures on Ancient Rhetoric, TI = Twilight of the Idols, UM = Untimely Meditations, Z = Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Citations refer to page numbers of cited editions.

[53] Here we come upon a long-standing criticism in Nietzsche interpretation which holds that, behind his critique of normative values, Nietzsche himself held a normative value-system based on health and amplification— on the "ascending" form of life, for instance. The first thing to say is Nietzsche did not think it was possible to have a value-free, criterion-less attitude or stance in life because we are foremost historically-situated beings already nested in value-laden contexts. Language—and what language draws out as the "mattering-to-us" (LN 109)— is one example. The question for Nietzsche is: to what extent are these earlier interpretations unduly— perhaps unutterably— restrictive for individuals? What I want to suggest here is that for Nietzsche, the normative criterion of ascending and declining health are not literal, but in many ways reflective of his concern for the narrowing of options in culture, and what this signifies for an individual wishing to overcome and speak about those restrictions. He is clear to say, for instance, that "every *heightening of man* brings with it an overcoming of *narrower interpretations*; that every increase in strength and expansion of power opens up new *perspectives* and demands a belief in new horizons—this runs through my writings (L 80, second emphasis mine)". In a deeper sense, if one were to then ask why it is 'life'—whether ascending or decadent—that is chosen as the ultimate criterion, we would quickly be reminded of his oft-quoted claim that life needs no justification. To posit a justification is to continue to evaluate life at the epistemic level. *As* knowledge, Nietzsche wishes to "leave [these] distinctions to those epistemologists who have got tangled up in the snares of grammar," even to "folk metaphysicians" concerned with the nature of reality and human perception; in the end, he writes, "we simply have no organ for *knowing*, for 'truth': we 'know' (or believe to imagine) exactly as much as is *useful* to the human herd, to the species: and even what is here called 'usefulness' is finally also just a belief, a fiction, and perhaps just that supremely fatal stupidity of which we some day will perish" (GS 214).

[54] By 'we' here, Nietzsche does not mean the individual in terms of intentional acts. Rather, the 'we' refers to the social and historical communities we grow into. This will be outlined further in the next section on the social dimension of language.

[55] For Nietzsche, it is not necessary to accept these structures as true in themselves in order to still rely on them for coherence and the ordering of our speech; we can simply rely on them as conventions without also accepting them as foundational to produce the same effect of continuity and intelligibility. Thus, for Nietzsche, "however habituated" a particular "fiction" may be, "that in no way disproves its having been invented: something can be a condition for life and nevertheless be false" (LN 21, see also BGE 202). After all, Nietzsche writes that "if men had not built houses for their gods, architecture would still be in its infancy" (E 228).

[56] This view is not conventional, as the theme of language is typically not seen as a unifying concern in Nietzsche's thought, However, as Alan Shrift (the new editor of Stanford University Press' English translation of the Colli-Montinari *Kritische Studienausgabe*) has argued, due in great deal to issues of translation and accessibility, "few have related Nietzsche's early insights into the nature of language to the work of his so-called 'mature' period. More often than not, Nietzsche's break with the academic world of classical philology is taken to indicate a significant turn in the Nietzschean project, dividing his earlier strictly 'scholarly' pursuits from his more 'philosophically' significant later work as the revaluer of values and philosopher of the *Ubermensh* and the eternal recurrence. This strict division between the 'young' and the 'mature' Nietzsche needs to be brought into question, as several of Nietzsche's early views on language, while no longer pursued as a specific topic of inquiry, reappear throughout the entirety of his writings" (1990, 123). That said, I would like to stress caution in my own 'cohesive' narrative of Nietzsche's views on language, as Nietzsche is not a systematic thinker that can fall under a single, narrative account of 'what Nietzsche means' or 'believes'.

[57] Mikhail Bakhtin, who traces the history of nineteenth-century linguistics to the assumption that thought emerges independently of communication (thereby producing "plastic notions of speech life"), would perhaps express Nietzsche's claim as the idea that all thought and human understanding is inherently dialogical—that "speech is a necessary condition for reflection, *even in solitude*" (1986, 67, my emphasis). For Bakhtin, "a speaker presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances—his own and others'—with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (builds upon them, polemicizes with them, or simply presumes that they are already known to the listener). Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (69).

[58] I use the term 'dialogical' in the Bakhtinian sense of an extra-linguistic, social element that pervades all speech communication. On such a view, any possible utterance made by a speaker is already shaped and guided in advance by a prior network of utterances that allow the new utterances to have a particular kind of significance for both speaker and listener; when Bakhtin remarks that "these extra-linguistic (dialogic) aspects also pervade the utterance from within," (Bakhtin 1986, 109), he is referring to the dialogical nature of all thought—that even thinking in silence requires the previous existence of other speakers (from whom one inherits the cultural vocabularies used to formulate utterances in the first place). To be sure, Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic (which he also applies to literary theory) relies on an abstract, generalized 'other' rather than a concrete, particular 'other' (as in a specific, conversational partner in speech communication or dialogue).

[59] To create new values, one would need the third aspect of spirit's metamorphosis: the child. To recall, the child signifies "innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes saying" (Z 17).

[60] Although it is the start of a formidable liberational project for the individual, Nietzsche suggests that human beings are not radically free. This is because consciousness of one's own freedom ties us to "the values of millennia"; like Zarathustra's tree standing alone on the mountaintop, having grown *beyond* humans and animals, "if it wanted to speak it would have no one who understood it" (Z 30). Seeking 'freedom' and being 'free spirited' or a free spirit are thus different things. While the former seeds psychological efforts that often lead to simple value inversions or the adoption of immortality schemes, the latter requires great courage and a

series of deep, transformative efforts on the part of the linguistically-nested individual (or enunciative subject). It is not a simple task to take up. Neither is it something one ever 'arrives at' in a static way.

[61] In a similar vein, Nietzsche asks: "an assumption may be irrefutable—why should that make it *true*? This proposition may outrage logicians, who posit *their* limits as the limits of things; but I have long since declared war on this optimism of logicians" (LN 35).

[62] "The way people usually are," Nietzsche reminds us, "it takes a name to make something visible at all" (GS 151), and, according to him, there has been no shortage of naming in the Western intellectual tradition since the rise of Milesian philosophy and Greek reason in Asia Minor in the 5th and 6th centuries BCE. Aristotle himself recounts this history (see *Metaphysics* I, 983b, 7). The prejudice of formal naming holds strong in this tradition, Nietzsche tells us, because it is undergirded by a conceptual system based on, for example, Aristotelian principles of identity and non-contradiction and views of substance that privilege what appears over what does not. This, in turn, is also made possible by a prior bifurcation of concepts along dichotomies, but where one side of the dichotomy is always valued over the other (as in good/evil or light/dark). We are accustomed to drawing our attention to what appears, to what 'is' the case to the point where, "to the extent that it *is*"—"we can't think anything at all". This is what Nietzsche is trying to get at here, that centuries of ossified prejudices and assumptions have made it extremely difficult for individuals in the modern age to self-legislate because we cannot even grasp the extent to which "the intellectual activity of millennia is set down in language" (E 128). The things 'names' make visible in the modern age are thus not 'things' at all, but rather the sedimented valuations inherited from past epochs—valuations whose original relation to truth and meaning are themselves concealed from view: "whatever is some being's 'external world' consists of a sum of valuations; green, blue, red, hard, soft are *inherited valuations and their emblems*" as opposed to 'facts' or objective truths (LN 15). This view is echoed in Luce Irigaray's assertion that "language is a product of the sedimentations of languages of former eras. It conveys methods of social communication. It's neither universal, nor neutral, nor intangible. There are no universal linguistic structures in the brain of the speaking subject; rather, every era has its specific needs, creates its own ideals, and imposes them as such" (1993, 30).

[63] This is the case, whether in his early notebooks or throughout late works like *Twilight of the Idols* . See, in particular, "The Wanderer and His Shadow" where Nietzsche begins with the line " …it is so long since I heard your voice, I would like to give you an opportunity of speaking" (UM 301-302).

[64] According to Habermas, it also furnishes *every* individual's validity claims (which she can then *independently* accept or reject by taking a 'yes' or 'no' position). The passage, in full reads: "since moralities are tailored to suit the fragility of human beings individuated through socialization, they must always solve *two* tasks at *once*. They must emphasize the inviolability of the individual by postulating equal respect for the dignity of the individual. But they must also protect the web of intersubjective relations of mutual recognition by which these individuals survive as members of a community. To these two complementary aspects correspond the principles of justice and solidarity respectively. The first postulates equal respect and equal rights for the individual, whereas the second postulates empathy and concern for the well-being of one's neighbor. Justice in the modern sense of the term refers to the

subjective freedom of inalienable individuality. Solidarity refers to the well-being of associated members of a community who intersubjectively share the same life-world."

[65] To be clear, Nietzsche never relinquishes the importance of the social framework; he only objects to its status as the only possible one. However, by not giving up the hermeneutic element of our understanding, Nietzsche commits himself to the idea that, while we may gain insights into our concrete, corporeal specificity and individuality through attunement to our bodies, this will not lead to a clear positing of an autonomous self. For example, he is careful to use the word "penumbra" to describe the individual self. This is in keeping with Nietzsche's anti-foundationalist philosophy. Although the self (whether the Cartesian self or as multiplicitous subjects) can never be thought of as true-in-itself, we can nonetheless use the concept strategically to live more resilient, affirming lives 'in spite of' the forces that constrain us.

[66] Although Nietzsche never develops this at length, he seems to suggest an alternative mode of thinking that is pre-lingual and relies heavily on the "psyche" as a differentiated form of incarnate consciousness (LN 113, 133). He terms this "primal thinking" (E 153). Primal thinking is a Dionysian-like phenomenon that gestures towards "a sphere which is beyond and prior to all phenomena" (BT 55)—and which can never be properly symbolized through denotative language. In his earlier work, art, especially poetry and music, can tap partially into this sphere, and can alleviate some of the feeling of being 'silenced' by giving breadth to the notion that something can be "unknowable" or "unspeakable" but nonetheless "felt". As his well-known quote suggests: "here, where the danger to his will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert in healing" (BT 60). However, by the summer of 1877, five years after the publication of his *Birth of Tragedy* and reflecting his turn away from Wagner, Nietzsche writes: "to the readers of my writings I want to declare unequivocally that I have abandoned the metaphysico-artistic views that essentially dominate those writings: they are pleasant but untenable. If one takes the liberty of speaking in public early one is usually obliged to contradict oneself in public soon after" (E 228).

[67] In making the distinction between conscious and unconscious realms it is important to note that Nietzsche did not bifurcate the two realms along Platonic lines. Just like he does not rule out the possibility "that somewhere else other interpretations than merely human ones may be possible" (LN 80), Nietzsche does not think the idea of multiple consciousnesses is true in itself; it is a perspectival mode of engaging lived experience in the face of our current conceptual orthodoxies.

[68] Here, the objection might be raised that even "unconscious" dream life requires interpretive frameworks based on historical contexts. We do, after all, talk about the meaning of our dreams and attempt to decipher what first appear to be hazy, causally fragmented chains of signs, events, and so forth, but which nonetheless can be communicated as such. In talking about a dream we had of a nebulous aura or strange alien, for example, we come to see that the perceptibility of the alien or nebulae was predicated on our capacity to recognize attributes, qualities, and situational cues that allow such images to make sense as those kinds of things versus others. However, the difference comes from Nietzsche's emphasis on the primacy of the body. It is the body, understood as a kind of incarnate consciousness, that interprets faint sounds of "church bells" and *recodes* the stimuli through various complex physiological functions, which, in turn, are themselves interpreted in dream life (D 75). One way I understand what Nietzsche means here comes from an experience I had recently. I was away from home

and staying in quarters for visiting faculty inside a university student union building. As the building was unoccupied at night, it was peculiarly quiet. One night, I had what appeared to be a very strange dream: for what seemed like hours I could perceive no identifiable image or memorable impression, like an idea about where I was or how I felt. The dream had only an acoustic dimension wherein I heard the same sound over and over. Although I described it as a 'drumbeat' to my partner when waking, it did not possess those qualities in the dream. I had no other means of describing it except in those terms. The sound merely followed a sequence of (what I can describe as, post facto) iambic patterns (.—, .—, .—, etc.). It was only on account of a sudden arousal that I happened to notice the pattern was in fact, the sound of my own heartbeat.

[69] It is important to note that the idea of multiple 'consciousnesses,' or of an 'unconscious' dimension, is not original to Nietzsche. Although we can find early traces in Christian Platonism and mysticism, historically, it arose in European thought as a response to Cartesian philosophy, whether as a reaction to Descartes' theory of ideas, or the more general rejection of first principles in German Romanticism. [In *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1704), for example, Leibniz gives an account of human volition defined by both perceptible and imperceptible inclinations (or 'volitions') in the individual (II, xxi, §39). He writes: "Various perceptions and inclinations combine to produce a complete volition: it is the result of the conflict among them. There are some, *imperceptible in themselves*, which add up to a disquiet which impels us without our seeing why. There are some which join forces to carry us towards or away from some object, in which case there is desire or fear, also accompanied by disquiet but not always one amounting to pleasure or displeasure. (1996, 192, my emphasis).] However in Nietzsche's case, the influence came directly from Schopenhauer's notion of the unconscious and from German Romantic thought. The latter, particularly through the figures of Goethe, Schelling, and Hölderlin, became systematized in Eduard von Hartmann's classic study, *Philosophie des Unbewussten* (1869). As Julian Young notes, "now forgotten, this book by someone who took himself to be a disciple of Schopenhauer, enjoyed enormous celebrity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and contributed to the process of making Schopenhauer's ideas widely known" (2005, 241). Although he rejects and criticizes many of Hartmann's core ideas, this may explain Nietzsche's initial interests in his work.

[70] Rhetorically, a trope is a figure of speech or play on words that derives from the Greek *tropos*, meaning a "turn" or "change". Specifically, Nietzsche relied on Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero as his models for his theory of rhetoric, which he outlined in several lectures given at the university of Basel under the titles "Einletung zur Rhetorik des Aristotles," "Geschichte der griechischen Beredsamkeit," and "Darstellung der antiken Rhetorik". Although Nietzsche's theory of tropes is intricate and heterodox to his day, as Christian Emden explains, broadly speaking, Nietzsche saw rhetoric as an explanatory model capable of "formulating relationships among the external world, physical stimulation, nervous processes, mental representations, and knowledge" (Emden, 90).To this end, as Emden continues, "the most important aspect of rhetoric—namely, the tropical nature of language—is a form *of transference or transposition*, and metaphor became a master trope for Nietzsche insofar as it accurately describes such a transference" (2005, 105-106). For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus only on this transference aspect of metaphor.

[71] Carol Blair first translated these lectures into English in the 1980s. Although established from the original manuscripts in Weimar, William Calder and Anton Bierl took issue with the critical aspects of Blair's independent 1983 translation, sufficient to promote the publication of a new

bilingual edition five years later in 1989: *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ed. and trans. Carole Blair, Sander L. Gilman, and David J. Parent (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). It is this latter edition which I follow (Hereafter *RL*). Because of the striking similarities of Nietzsche's views on language with contemporary French thought, it is also of some importance to note the wide availability of these texts in French by the early 1970s, due in large part to efforts by Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Paul de Man, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. See, for example, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's "Friedrich Nietzsche. Rhétorique et langue: Textes traduits, presénts et annotés," *Poetique* 5 (1971): 99-142 and Gilles Deleuze's (ed.) *Nietzsche: Cahiers du Royaumont, Philosophie* No. VI (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967). The latter is a compilation of important papers given at an international conference on Nietzsche held in 1964 in Royaumont, France; participants included Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Karl Löwith, Gianni Vattimo, Gabriel Marcel, G. Colli and M. Montnari, to name a few.

[72] Although Nietzsche makes well known remarks on individual creation (i.e., that "in the long run it is enough to *create new names* and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create new 'things' " GS 70, my emphasis), what Nietzsche means by "create" is at issue here. Nietzsche's conception of newness and originality—how we typically think of creation— is not what one would expect: "What is originality? To see something that still has no name; that still cannot be named even though it is lying right before everyone's eyes" (GS 151). Being able to call to attention—to 'diagnose'— the prejudices in our traditions (without thinking we can "wholly free ourselves" from them) is the focal point of creative life because it will allow us to set up conditions more favorable to a life of freedom— to metamorphosize, with the help of the child, from the lion into the free spirit.

[73] That is to say, they are "based on a physiological process unknown to us, a kind of acquired language for designating certain nervous stimuli" that does not show up at the level of thought or concepts (D 79). This process, as will be explained, is what Nietzsche means in part by metaphorical activity.

[74] Examples include Brian Leiter, Helmut Heit, and to a lesser extent, Bernd Magnus.

[75] This distinction informs Nietzsche's notion that "we have to *learn to think differently* in order at last, perhaps very late on, to attain even more: *to feel differently*" (D 60).

[76] To put this another way, for Nietzsche, a stimulus is a nervous impulse that has *already* been interpreted, and this is the "first metaphor;" at the conscious level, we transpose the first metaphor into the signs and formulas we've grown into, reproducing them in sounds (words), and this is the "second metaphor" (OTL 256). Saying the word "cat" is therefore already a second-order metaphor shaped by culture. The figurative process does not end there. For Nietzsche, "*metaphor* means treating as *equal* something that one has recognized to be *similar* in one point," like treating the concept of a thing as the thing itself (E 160). We thus uncover that within this notion of metaphor the concept of metonymy is already hard at work, since metonymy operates "by substituting the name of an object closely associated with a word for the word itself", like 'the crown' for the ruling monarch (Handbook to Literature, 1999, 319). On his view, then, metaphor is a *metonymical transference* of sorts that happens both within the human body and at the level of culture. It is the *latter*-stage metonymical transferences (codified in grammar) that register, for us, as truth or knowledge, but which are essentially metaphors— hence the relationship of truth and language. This is why, for Nietzsche, "truths

are illusions that are no longer remembered as being illusions, metaphors, that have become worn and stripped of their sensuous force, coins that have lost their design and are now considered only as metal," as mere words, rather than coins with a specific type of original currency and value (OTL 257-58). Thus, although on Nietzsche's account, nervous impulses undergo a figurative process that eventually leads to the domain of spoken and written language, it does not *have to* lead to written, alphabet-based forms of language by necessity-- this is simply a prejudice of Western, logographic culture (RL 23). If we've grown into a culture that privileges different forms of linguistic expression, then the second-order metaphor will in all likelihood manifest itself differently. An Inuit speaker, for example, might express a word through a particular facial expression rather than a sound. In particular, what stays the same is "how concepts are formed: every word immediately becomes a concept precisely because it is *not intended to serve as a reminder of the unique, entirely individualized primal experience* to which it owes its existence" (OTL 256, my emphasis). No doubt influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger makes a similar point about the nature of language: "language, as what is spoken out and said, and as what can be said again, preserves in each case the being that has been opened up. What has been said can be said again and passed on. The truth that is preserved in this saying spreads in such a way that *the being that was originally opened up in gathering is not itself properly experienced in each particular case.* In what is passed on, truth loosens itself, as it were, from beings. This can go so far that saying-again becomes mere hearsay, *glossa.* Everything that is asserted stands constantly in this danger" (*Introduction to Metaphysics,* 198, my emphasis).

[77] Nietzsche was careful to observe that in describing language as a metaphoric chain of interpretations he did not deploy causal inferences in the strict sense; "to infer from the nerve stimulus the existence of a cause outside us is the result of a false and unjustified application of the principle of sufficient reason" (OTL 255).

[78] But, as Kofman cautions, we should not interpret Nietzsche's notion of metaphor as a new, fixed interpretive paradigm for making sense of lived experience, as "the notion of metaphor is itself just a metaphor"(1993,40). According to her, "metaphorical activity does not just mean anthropomorphism by another name: explanatory schemata express the world improperly, but they are no more appropriate to express man. When he uses them to understand himself he is still practicing rhetoric, for if man indeed takes what is 'given' to him in order to transpose it elsewhere (which is what constituted metaphor), what is given to him has always already been tamed by the 'camera obscura' or sifted through consciousness" (33).

[79] This is especially difficult to express because the German word *Körper* is often understood in terms of the Cartesian/Newtonian sense of the body as *res extensa*, of a bounded material thing that can be measured and that occupies a determinate place in a spatio-temporal coordinate system. This is obviously not what Nietzsche is referring to.

[80] I am indebted to Ofelia Schutte for this point.

[81] For instance, to the extent that Nietzsche's interpreting 'individual' is not a traditional subject, but rather a version of what Maurice Blanchot calls "an egoism without an ego", it can be *strategically* appropriated by postcolonial theory as a subject of enunciation that places special emphasis on the fluid, irreducible movement of life rather than on a substantial essence or intentionality. It is in this same vein, I should add, that Ortega also uses select "Heideggerian

elements" to theorize the complex experiences of the "multiplicitous selves" despite his (even more clearly) problematic politics (2001,17).

[82] Spivak defines this as "a strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest". As was the case in Argentina, for instance, a group of women under the specter of a brutal dictatorship may choose to make claims individually and on behalf of each other by appealing to their identities as mothers, an identity that historically, in patriarchal cultures, has been used to serve as a regulative concept or category over women's bodies, one that asphyxiates the open range of self-interpretative possibilities they have as beings, but in the interests of patriarchal domination and servitude. The women's creative strategy to make claims *as* mothers of their murdered or disappeared children, however, was an effective political counterthrust to a military regime that operated through intimidation, terror, 'accidents by design' and maintained power by censoring all media, banning public protest and organized forms of civil unrest.

[83] The term derives from the cultural anthropologist and theorist, Néstor García Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures* (2005[1989]).

[84] To avoid comparisons with Greek culture, the image is drawn from the *genus*, not the Lernaean Hydra of Greek mythology.

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