

Pimbert2.doc

**The construction of the exterior by discourse and its mimetic aims
Patrick Imbert, University of Ottawa¹.****1/ Discourse and its exterior.**

Nature presents a challenge to the mimesis of appropriation when it is considered external to discourse. The relationship of desire to the model transits through the model's capacity to impose itself as the master of forces governing social and individual desires. This force comes from the capacity to be on the side of tutelary powers, and able to establish their signification. The rival attempts to seize the legitimacy to dictate an exterior to human discourse, to translate into human language the superhuman (Greek gods), the non-human (natural forces) or celestial ones (a monotheistic god). In a religious society, the exterior is linked to a religious orthodoxy and in a lay society to scientific theories or political programs. As Nancy Huston says in *Nord perdu* : "est important ce qui est traduisible"² (what counts is what can be translated). This exterior to discourse demands translators that are often involved in acts of 'passing', that is models that show how to move in a world that agrees on values.

Also at play, however, is the notion that the non-human constructs itself in the discourse of power. One must therefore determine a celestial exterior that permits the indication of a desirable route through the realm of societal constructions. A celestial language can indicate, for instance, that it is uniquely good to construct a society turned to the spiritual. Forces are then galvanized to build churches, sacred arts, religious vocations, etc. This focus will in turn become the object of struggles between orthodox translations of the Word, inspired readings, prophetic ones, direct ones, those that are multiple (the Kabala or the Safed school), and those that are monosemic. This will lead eventually to shared interpretations, and to diverse social consensus as in the fictionalized struggles in *L'oeuvre au noir* by Marguerite Yourcenar and *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco. Wealth as recognition from God is manifest in the beliefs of Protestants and of Max Weber in his work *Protestant Ethics and the spirit of Capitalism*. Sometimes the overlap in interpretations of the heavenly may turn towards another order, towards a more marked split between values and facts. The split could lead, as it did during the Renaissance and Western forms of modernity, to a structured tradition of the heavenly and to a validation of the material world and of rational pragmatism.

2/ Nature, the body, and territory as rooted issues.

From then on, struggles for the translation of the celestial become a validation of the human world, and conflicts occur at its organizational level without abandoning the

¹ pimbert@uottawa.ca <http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/arts/lettres/imberty.html>

University Research Chair Holder: Theme: "Canada: Social and Cultural Goals in a Knowledge Based Society.

² Huston, Nancy (1999). *Nord perdu*, Montréal, Leméac/Actes sud, p. 90.

heavenly altogether. There are other challenges to this desire for translation: how to express the external, the world of matter, in terrestrial discourse. How can one master this matter? How can it be organized? These questions are not of course expressed within a vacuum, but rather within a logic that has already shaped the desire linked to knowledge of the world, to its transformation by man, and to man's links to the celestial. This way of framing the question reinstates the logic of the Biblical narrative in which man springs from the earth, and thereby invokes an inherent relationship between the body of man and the earth. This nationalistic narrative, transformed into the universal by the Catholic Church, establishes the relationship of the body to the territory as the challenge of the mimetic struggle, as its desirable object. This narrative then tries to organize the world external to discourse in its material function by relating it to the translation of the celestial and to the dynamic of creation. This is rendering unto Caesar and to God each his own.

The split between the two aims leads historically in the West and in westernized countries to organizations that embrace new relationships to the natural world and its riches, from feudalism to socialism, through liberalism. The natural world has thus always presented a major challenge between men who, in their attempts to inscribe their body in it, to control it, have not hesitated to engage in genocide and wars.

The right to property is the particular outcome of positioning where the capacity to establish the celestial exterior is democratized by the Protestant ethic, with each believer granted the right to directly address God, and to read the Bible directly in order to produce individual meanings. This mode troubles the authority of the Catholic hierarchy, and asserts (coupled with the influence of Judaic and Kabbalistic thought spread during the Renaissance) the possibility of multiplying readings, those at the margins becoming successively less marginalized because each is a legitimate source of meaning based on the sacred text. In the interpretation of the will of God along non-orthodox lines, it becomes every man for himself. This conferred power and this confidence granted to each person opens the way to self-affirmation. The individual has the right to root himself in his own mini-territory, and to enrich his life. The relationship of the body to the glebe, potentially that of an individual in the biblical narrative, asserts itself as a right no longer monopolized by the elite that controls large territories, prohibits movement within them, and that constrains the body to servitude. When this desire for a connection between the body and the territory is transposed onto the new spaces of the Americas, 'empty' because the occupants are only barbarians and nomads³ with neither the sense of property nor of work, it is the Gold Rush. Bodies that stand in the way are eliminated in the rush to acquire territory.

From there, the United States granted title to land and property and territories to individuals by virtue of Abraham Lincoln's Homestead Act, a formula since repeated in many countries in the Americas, from Canada to Argentina, and also Australia, and New Zealand.

³ Sarmiento, Domingo F. (1934). *Facundo*, Paris, Stock. See also: Couillard, Marie et Patrick Imbert (2000). «L'invention des Amériques: de barbarie/civilisation à oisiveté/travail», *Revue canadienne de littérature comparée*, vol. 27, n^o 3, septembre 2000, p. 437-461.

The reading of the celestial through challenges to the outside of human discourse such as the will of God, or the natural world and its environments, leads therefore to a desire for a certain type of society.

The natural world continues to be the endless source of contention between mimetic rivalries. A recent article in the *Harvard Business Review*⁴, proposes that contemporary countries could face the challenges of Globalization if they followed Lincoln's example and created a middle class of individuals marching toward status through capitalization and the right to property. The journalist asserts that in our day, we reproach globalization the fact that educated people and professionals profit, while the poor cannot. The article proposes Lincoln's example as a remedy:

America's example suggests that initial increases in income inequality need not cause policy makers in emerging countries undue concern, provided they have a plan in the medium term to narrow the gap. Of course, not every nation has a vast frontier that allows for a program like America's Homestead Act. But even legislation that grants people clear title to land they now occupy can go a long way toward fostering the stability in a large property owning class⁵.

A few considerations stand out. First, that the American model is held up as a desirable social reorganization of the natural world. We must emphasize that countries, including the present-day United States, no longer consist of a 'frontier' and of a vast space open for expansion. We can detect in the text's reasoning, the belief in life as a zero-sum game as concerns territory and property. This emphasizes that even in an article with a liberal economist outlook, the belief in a zero-sum game can persist. It must be a strongly-held stance to unconsciously emerge in a context wherever its associations grant it a place. This place is territory, or more explicitly, a surface. When a text only deals with territories the zero sum game stereotype is always present. It is when a thinker is able to exit the territorial logic that he is able to escape from this limiting stereotype often used by Marxists or antiglobalization movements to impose their agendas. Through a contemporary economist's logic, explored by Hernando de Soto⁶ in his publications on Peruvian property rights, we can clearly see that the invention of a landowners' class does not come strictly from land grants. Granting commercial licences is at least as important, if not more so, as is granting the financial and educational means to children to train them for specialized professions. The 'frontier' is no longer merely territorial, but situates itself at the level of the natural world as a resource which human knowledge and millennia of accumulated knowledge⁷ transform into wealth. New frontiers include not only exploration at the cellular level, and of other planets, but also in the realm of human concepts, mathematical theory and communication networks. As Etzioni suggested in *The*

⁴ *Harvard Business Review*, August 2003, p.63.

⁵ p.63.

⁶ De Soto, Hernando (1990). *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World*, New York, Harper and Row.

⁷ See the requirements established by a U.S. and international point of view in the development of the wealth about to be brought to a country such as Chad.

Active Society in 1968, symbolic capital and knowledge are infinite frontiers that displace the concept of nature towards that of creation.

Liberalism linked to the discourse of communication gives fresh hope to the word 'creation' with regard to nature targeted by first-degree positivist, and often materialist, beliefs. By first degree we wish to emphasize the conflictual relationship of men and the environment, culminating in a process of industrialization that contradicts Bateson's⁸ critique of social Darwinism: an organism that wishes to survive is not the strongest, according to him, but the one that knows how to use and prosper in the environment without destroying it. Thus, in a semiotic context of communication, the human being would not be a predator in relation to nature, but rather a domesticated parasite living in environmental symbiosis.

Symbolization of the environmental exterior

This critique of culture linked to the zero-sum games of territory, positivism, nationalism and dualisms approaches the contemporary liberal and postmodern/postcolonial view of the natural environment as external to discourse. How is the natural symbolized, or translated into discourse, whether it be artistic, literary or through media? Historically, in the context of nation-states and their closed borders, of social Darwinism linked (as Shapiro⁹ has mentioned) to a Hegelian vision of identity where the other is seen as the exterior to reject, symbolism springs from realism. There is a tendency to believe that the exterior to discourse could be presented transparently. Jesus Martín Barbero¹⁰ argues it well, and reminds us that this belief unites the bourgeois classes of Western countries in the 19th century. These classes share a world-view that reflects their own seeming mastery, linked to their technological-industrial access. The gaze, the description of the novelist, and the brushstroke of the painter can dominate nature. This agreement in the financial classes' point of view on control and nature manifests itself by producing an inevitable victims: the low paid workers enlisted in the domination of nature and often perceived as being part of it. Marxists and socialists will point to working classes as that victim.

To do so, Marxists and Socialists demonstrate their belief that life is a zero-sum game and assert that as the rich get richer, the poor get poorer. In fact, it does appear that the totality of wealth is a finite number. It appears that there is no 'frontier'. Planetary territories are all under the control of colonial powers or under the control of a financial

⁸ Bateson, Gregory (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, New York, Ballantine.

⁹ Shapiro, Michael J. (1997). *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁰ Martín Barbero, Jesús (1999). «Globalización comunicacional y descentramiento cultural», dans *La dinámica global/local* (Rubens Bayardo et Mónica Lacarrieu, dir.), Buenos Aires, Ed. Ciccus/la Crujia.

and industrial bourgeoisie. It seems that there is no location in which another form of logic could establish itself as a model. Yet, simultaneously, in the XIXth century and in a part of the XXth century, no one asks about natural resources, because they appear immense. The only preoccupation is the closure of space and its control by a ruling class. This is very different from the perspective at the close of the 20th century, after the fuel crisis of 1973, when ecology and Buddhist-inspired works such as *Small is Beautiful* reiterated that the natural world was not limitless but finite.

To return to the 19th century, however, we must note that the Marxists were not alone. Liberal and even Conservative thinkers in the Americas noticed that the European working classes were destroyed by industrialization, the lack of space, etc. This was the case presented by Sarmiento¹¹ in Argentina, in his travel narratives, it was also the case with Beaudry¹² or Parent¹³ in Quebec, and of Fermin Toro¹⁴ in Venezuela, to mention a few examples. All of these obviously had a concept of space as an immense, empty territory open to future settlers and landowners. From their perspective, the European peasant or labourer should reinvent as a settler, that is, as a mix of peasant and farmer. This agricultural society in expansion was nonetheless confronted with the filling of space as Innis has shown with regard to the development of urban centres and of industrialization in Canada. As for Fermin Toro, he asserted in a remarkable way that a territory must be open to a larger conception of it, as a space where individuals are free to move. He consequently argued that amongst the right to move and to leave one's country be included in the Constitution of Venezuela. Territory as a location surrounded by a boundary was, in his mind, open to its potential for expansion and for movement. This concept is the one now found, albeit displaced, in the postmodern works of Pico Iyer, and particularly in *The Global Soul*¹⁵.

3/ Realistic representation.

Realistic representation thus manifests as agreement on a system of values that constructs the world within the challenges and projects of an industrialized society instrumentalizing nature, and organizing itself into consumer/producer relationships. This

¹¹ Rockland, Michael Aaron (1970). *Sarmiento's Travels in the United States in 1847*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

¹² Beaudry, Hercule (1861). *Le conseiller du peuple*, Montréal, SÉNÉCAL.

¹³ Parent, Étienne (1847). *Du travail chez l'homme*, Montréal, Institut canadien, 23 février 1847.

¹⁴ Toro, Fermin (1960). «Europa y America», dans *La doctrina conservadora*, Caracas, Ediciones conmemorativas des sesquicentenario de la independencia, (1^{er} éd. 1839).

¹⁵ Iyer, Pico (2000). *The Global Soul*, New York, Vintage

type of representation is therefore constrained by its belief in the zero-sum game on the one hand, with its contradictory belief in the potential to create wealth on the other. We see this in an article in *Actualité*¹⁶ entitled “Femmes riches = hommes pauvres?,” suggesting that if women become richer men will become poorer. In any case, realistic representation is caricatured in a recent advertisement at Workopolis.com, the largest job search website in Quebec. Three quarters of a page in the daily *La Presse*¹⁷ is dedicated to a man painting a cow in its pasture. This animal, however, strongly identified as it is with industrial agriculture and the preferred means of European colonization, managed to displace African and other local species, and is represented here as a sparerib by the amateur painter’s brush, a butcher by profession. The image has a strong impact. It pairs well with the irony of the following joke that very tellingly portrays the boundaries of an esthetic and of realistic modernity anchored in a bourgeois, nationalistic vision of territory: A painter is asked what his painting represents. ‘A cow in its pasture,’ the painter answers. ‘But I don’t see the pasture,’ the viewer replies. ‘It was eaten by the cow,’ replies the painter. The observer asks a second question, ‘Where is the cow?’ The painter replies, ‘It’s gone, because there is nothing left to eat’¹⁸.

In modernity, the natural world as the object of desire is the site of mimetic struggles of appropriation, because to establish a common vision also establishes access to a supposed reality. The mimesis of appropriation aims to control reality or a belief in the possibility to copy reality. [This allows the construction of consensus by embedding it within national borders linked to the will to create a protected economic market sufficiently large in a dynamic of property legitimation that transforms it into an appendage of industrialized urban concentrations.](#)

This aim is expressed at the aesthetic level by the gaze of realistic representation that knows how to extract function from belief, and transparency from the world, through codes imagined to have a minimal effect. The exterior is therefore mastered by the aesthetic, and by applied science and technology. The exterior is seen and mastered, and markets, politically protected by the boundaries that enclose them, thereby develop and determine a certain potential for expansion. As we have seen, this is revealed in the belief of the world as a zero-sum game, and of the environment as a territory. This exterior is also the locus for creating wealth when it is seen as a way of constructing knowledge, that is to say, space. [Postmodernity, with reference to the nation state logic and limitations, itself very close, in Europe, to an agricultural conception of territory, a location already full by the feudal era, displaces the functioning of this nation state immediately following the 2nd World War. In a context of rapidly changing urban developments and added value that represent the knowledge applied to industry thanks to the national education, public and free, and to the democratic access to colleges and universities, war-like conflicts aiming at controlling a finite world based on a territorial logic are displaced and transformed into multiple instances for economic, cultural and scientific competition.](#)

4/ Postmodernism/postcolonialism and displacement.

¹⁶ 15 October, 2003, p.63.

¹⁷ *La Presse*, Montreal, Thursday, July 11, 2003, p.D6.

¹⁸ Evelyn Martoniy, *Cahiers hongrois de la linguistique*,

In our postcolonial, postmodern era, the territorial logic that experiences location as a closed territory and border has certainly not disappeared, but has shifted. 'Post' does not mean 'after,' but rather 'beyond,' that is, after a fashion that pushes logic to an extreme, or that causes it to rebound in a movement that reveals humour through the success of another way, an effective distortion as in the humorous advertisement concerning cows.

The parody is in effect a mechanism of reflection¹⁹ on codes and on processes that lead to the invention of codes. This reflection permits meaning and impact to shift.

Nonetheless, if the logic of modernity and of the relatively autarchic nation state has not disappeared, then its modalities have transformed under current pressures: 1/ Specialized discourses such as the constructivism of the Palo Alto school, that rejects Darwinism to move to an ecological vision of relationships between the individual and the environment, founded according to a logic of communication and information. 2/ The emergence of subordinate groups such as the aboriginals of the Americas, who escape the imposed constructions of naturalization by whites, to turn instead towards globalized ecology to put forward their land claims, notably through non-governmental organizations like the United Nations. 3/ Ecological discourse takes over the discourse of the national park system that helped to conserve crown land since the late 19th century in the Americas, setting these lands apart from those of provincial territories in Canada, or State lands in the United States. 4/ As we have seen, the belief in life as a zero sum game is challenged by the legitimation of a new knowledge-based 'frontier' open to new forms of creation and individual production of signification. The third element such as in a Peircian²⁰ dynamic of interpretance, is now part of the dynamic instead of being excluded.

In other words, the mimetic challenge of territory shifts its argument when faced with the encounter between the postmodern and postcolonial. This argument links up with the erasure of territory effected by multinational companies, and with the movement of individuals, notably of professionals, those who market knowledge and expand their zone of influence, to become, as Pico Iyer explores in *The Global Soul*, from 'here' as well as from 'elsewhere'. These travellers seek the reflection of their multiple self-images in an urban context, distanced as they are from more traditional bases for identity such as religion and language²¹, the two elements essential in Quebec at the time of the Révolution tranquille, for instance. The linguistic element as a basis for identity is moreover a dynamic critiqued by Édouard Glissant : "Chaque fois qu'on lie expressément le problème de langue au problème de l'identité, à mon avis, on commet une erreur parce

¹⁹ See P. Imbert, *Trajectoires culturelles transaméricaines*, Ottawa : University of Ottawa Press, 2003, 252p.

²⁰ Peirce, Charles Sanders (1982). *Writings of C.S. Peirce*, Bloomington, Bloomington University Press, 4 vol.

²¹ See M. Crozier, S.P. Huntington, J. Watanaki, *Report on the Governability of Democracy to the Trilateral Commission*, New York, New York University Press, 1975.

que précisément ce qui caractérise notre temps, c'est ce que j'appelle l'imaginaire des langues, c'est-à-dire la présence à toutes les langues du monde²². [Each time we explicitly link the problem of language to the problem of identity, we commit an error, because what characterizes our era is precisely what I call the *imagination* of languages, because we are exposed to all the languages of the world].

6/ Territory and space.

The natural world defined on the one hand as part of a territory, and on the other hand, as a space is thus a major issue in this globalized century when people travel freely and physically encounter one another in migrations and symbols across worldwide networks. If we are in spatial proximity because no one is more than a day away from his contemporaries, we are nonetheless far apart from each other in a shrinking world, because diverse, antagonistic cultures are forced into closer contact. By cultures, we mean that dynamic proper to the mimesis of appropriation that aims to define the exterior by affirming that it can be copied and that by copying we approach wellbeing or an important efficiency, because it is true to the facts. This closing, inscribed as it is in the legitimacy of movement, appears to sidestep misunderstandings that plague autocracies as proved the encounter of the the European world and the Americas. But it also generates other possible frictions, because in the contemporary, unlike in the hippie utopias of the sixties and their psycho-socio-communicative derivatives, we notice that more information does not mean more meaningful communication. The basic precepts of the Age of Reason partly founder with this new awareness.

Frictions exacerbated by a knowledge mediated on the other (and we are always the other to another) manifest first as fundamentalisms. They operate deeply in the mimesis of appropriation, in the will to master the word of God, even at the price of the annihilation of the physical world and of bodies, in terrorist acts. These frictions also manifest in the expansion of visions respectful of the natural world and also in popularized forms of an aboriginal perspective such as in Carlos Castaneda's²³ literary productions.

Aboriginal worlds also receive particular attention from the media, because they displace the Christian relationship between man and soil and its nationalistic secularization anchored in a nation state. From this perspective, to spring from the earth does not connote a dualistic relationship between man/nature that leads to the domination of the natural world for the expansion of the group. Instead, the vision is collaborative and the hunter apologizes to the rabbit for killing it. Only short-term necessity matters, not the type of over-production that shifts from the agricultural to the industrial, and eventually produces toxic waste that threaten the world's welfare.

In our world, the mimesis of appropriation does not rest solely on the struggles of antagonistic groups who attempt to control territories and population (as in diverse forms

²² Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Montréal : Montreal University Press, 1995, p.84.

²³ Castaneda, Carlos (1974). *Journey to Ixtlan*, New York, Simon and Schuster.

of colonialism linked to modernity and nation states) to extract the maximum. The mimesis of appropriation aims on the one hand to struggle with ecological value systems slanted towards a respect for the earth and for the natural world reaffirming autochtony, and on the other hand, with a deterritorialization that constructs the planet as a globalized space. In this global space, a class of plugged-in individuals network its potential energy, finances and culture while developing an intercultural play of language and multiple self-images as the montrealer novelist Yann Martel evokes in *Life of Pi*.

7/ Creation.

This impulse to transform territory into open space, to switch from borders to the concept of the new ‘frontier’ is linked to the economic liberal view of the world as a non-zero-sum game that validates the creation of wealth. With an important increase in planetary trade relationships comes an attempt to substitute expansionist forms of creativity to restricted viewpoints. This new creativity does not see life as a zero-sum game, and reframes the concept of ‘frontier’ as an open space, open to the dissemination of knowledge, and to the redistribution of specialized language into public discourse²⁴.

The nature of the positivists is therefore displaced, and with it, the connotations of inertia, henceforth embedded in a network of relative knowledge. The perversion of a positivist vision of knowledge that has not only attained its zenith, but that also leads some to argue that at the end of the nineteenth century nothing is left to discover, can only make us smile, as Pauwels explores in *Le matin des magiciens*. Positivism and the secularization of nature that competes with the Christian sense of creation, emerges from now on as an ecological desire to preserve a natural state through parks and ecological preserves, complimentary to a scientific-economic-liberal creativity applied to the physical world. This creativity takes up the Christian concept of creation as a spiritual supplement to the capitalization of knowledge. It permits a transformation of the world by escaping the saying that nothing can be lost, nothing created, moving it closer to a traditional agricultural universe. Creativity as a human supplement to the level of knowledge is framed within a new form of spirituality that connects us to other cultures through ecology, or especially through aboriginal cultures, where the spirit is manifest in the natural world. We are a long way from the Jesuit exhortations that animals cannot have spirits, that only man has a soul, that all other creatures are lesser and are at service of humans. This was recently restated on the front page of the *Ottawa Citizen*: “Skip the blessing, your dog has no soul.”²⁵

The democratization of knowledge by a culture that validates creativity open to displacements in the form of powerful stereotypes replacing dualistic ones, of the boundary and of the world as a finite entity are evident in many recent literary works. One example is George Gilder’s *Wealth and Poverty*, popularizing, as did Amitaï Etzioni in *The Active Society*²⁶, economic thought and socio-cultural liberal observations,

²⁴ See Patrick Imbert, *The Pemanent Transition*, Frankfurt/Madrid, Vervuert/Iberoamericana, 1998.

²⁵ Saturday, October 4, 2003.

²⁶ Etzioni, Amitaï (1968). *The Active Society*, New York, The Free Press.

especially those of Hayek and the Chicago School. The grand contemporary process of moving societies towards globalization is committed to spread a new form of popularized knowledge on power relationships, and in particular, on what dictates them. Conflicts based on the mimesis of appropriation, on the struggles of antagonistic brothers expressed in war, exacerbated by a belief in life as a zero sum game, and thus founded on a lack, substitutes itself for democratic economic competition linked to the division of powers and the multiplication of individual responsibilities.

8/ The Body

The mimesis of appropriation is now situated in a world that, contrary to that of the Age of Reason, no longer considers that there are elements proper to modernity that are universal as rationality once was. It is no longer possible to argue with certainty that modernity is a-cultural, and that it represents the forward march of human progress, in step with human nature, attainable by any society. Nowadays, rationality is situated. It issues from a particular type of culture, that which requires, as does Christianity, simultaneous faith and the efforts of reason to approach the Word. This situated aspect of rationality is linked to modes of thought that take into account the physical incarnation of man, his body, and its importance. A vision of man as a creature of reason was plausible only before the mass genocides of the twentieth century, before soviet and maoist gulags, and before the will manifested by the States and also a part of the European intelligentsia to hush up these acts. Nonetheless, ever since the gulags, and the political and intellectual misinformation that attempted to cover up the dead until the end of WWII (for the Nazis), and until the publication of the *The Gulag Archipelago* (for the Marxist world), we take notice of the importance of the body.

We have certainly understood by now that Kafkaesque rationality could serve the deadly aims of bureaucracies by finding their justification in economic discourse, and their promises of betterment justified by wise men and thinkers. This is highlighted by the Argentinean writer Marcos Aguinis in *La Matriz del infierno*²⁷ or by Spiegelman in *Maus I* and *Maus II*²⁸. Nonetheless, we quickly grasped the motives of these genocidal states and their intellectual accomplices, especially those who held a part of symbolic power in Europe, namely to make the corpses disappear. The aim of those who spread a version of reality based on references to reality and on a capacity to say what is a fact based on 'scientific' explanations, was precisely to erase the single, undeniable fact outside of discourse, the passing from life into death. The only fact outside of discourse is the disappearance of the body, and because we can say nothing about it, except to observe the passage of life into death. In order to not have to acknowledge by what hand the person has been put to death, all that was required was that the dust fall into definitive oblivion. The complicity of misinformation between intellectuals and nation states struck a severe blow to the Age of Reason.

²⁷ Marcos Aguinis, *La matriz del infierno*, Buenos Aires, Editorial sudamericana, 2000.

²⁸ Spiegelman, Art (1973). *Maus*, New York, Pantheon Books. Spiegelman, Art (1986). *Maus II*, New York, Pantheon Books. See also: P.Imbert, www.relazionarte.com

The body then takes on its full meaning as part of the biological-natural world. It is the one that must never have existed, or that has vanished without a trace. The ‘hyper’ of modernity, that is, postmodernity and postcoloniality criticizes modernity’s form of realism, that which presents itself as an exact replica of the world linked to its beliefs, that pushes the logic of its quest towards facts. In this context, the only undeniable fact in socio-political-economic struggles manifesting the extremes of struggles proper to the mimesis of appropriation, is the consciousness of corpses and mass graves. The misinformation by dictatorships has led to this hyper because of disinformation and a dwindled access to reality. This hyper is linked to a new vision emphasizing that the passage of life into death and its record becomes essential in order to avoid the absolute relativism of dictators and most military regimes. This passage of a body from life to death is the only narrow point allowing us to have access to the outside of discourse, in a fleeting non semantizable instant. The constative record of the body passing from life to death is crucial for the foundation of any ethical value system. The rest, that is traitorous self-justifications are relegated to the order of political discourse. It resembles Girard’s argument regarding the crucial, explosive moment of the victimary process when mimetic violence mums the victim and particularly when that victim is Jesus. The record of the corpse as a narrow aspect outside of discourse indicates that it is still possible to point out the lie, that of the lynchers who use the mimesis of appropriation to claim that they have the truth—a truth that leads to the death, torture, and suffering of countless victims. The consciousness of the corpse is often expressed in its own genre, the *testimonio* in Latin America.

The body’s biological structure thus takes on a fundamental weight, in relation to the primacy of the rational, once believed universal. Its weight is such that it demands a shift in ways of thinking, in world views, including those that found liberalism.

Reflexivity and liberalism.

Gray argues “we are not disembodied, which does not mean we are radically situated.” In fact, if universality is inconceivable in a world where the importance of issues concerning the natural world is fundamental, coupled to the undeniable weight of the body and its cultural, economic, political and social localization, this must not entail a relapse into belief in an essentialist link to territory, whether it is framed in biblical terms, or in secular ones. As Gray has indicated, it is important to highlight the reflexivity of individuals, capable of self-definition. We can choose our connections, or cut them, we can decide to leave, to vote with our feet, because we have the right to go away, as said Fermin Toro in 19th century Venezuela. The local flavour of our experiences then takes on an important historical aspect, a freedom of movement thanks to our ability to scrutinize the codes and processes that constitute our experiences²⁹ and the possibilities that open to us when we are no longer satisfied. Reflexivity on codes and on processus of

²⁹ Certeau, Michel de (1982). *L’histoire, science et fiction dans la philosophie de l’histoire et la pratique historique aujourd’hui*, Ottawa, Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa.

legitimation, that capacity to return to the connections that construct our symbolic and territorial environment, is also a ‘frontier,’ in the loosest sense of the term. It approaches a Peircean ‘interpretance’ that avoids settling into habit and into the inertia of stereotypes, notably those that construct images of the other by a process of attribution³⁰ and trashing³¹. Reflexivity allows to choose from an immensity of choice what it will please us to make happen, by following some model or another. In fact, in the contemporary liberal world, an important aspect is that the models themselves multiply, and if that leads to a certain superficiality, it also leads to an individual sense of responsibility in the choice of models and in the hybridity of self-images formed from diverse models. The motley models and discourses lead to intercultural personalities.

9/ Reincarnations.

The body as spatially-situated in socio-cultural environments thus becomes a focal point in the intersection of historical constructions. This is why so many authors deconstruct the novelistic persona shaped as a psychological whole entity. [This deconstruction is noted by Kundera in *The Art of the Novel* when he observes the great inability of European civilization to recognize itself in its actions, a failure to understand that great novelists, for centuries, have enacted the inability of the novel’s hero to recognize himself by his acts.](#) This gap in understanding has led to missing the fact that all, in this civilization, does not lead to the rational progress of humanity, but emerges in the novelistic form, on the production of texts that explore the positioning of the body in function of power relationships, in function of the very challenge of the body as a biological reality inscribed in mimetic struggles.

This is the case in Yann Martel’s *Self*³², with its protagonist as a raped woman, then a man, whose life changes tone depending on the context. A similar dynamic is visible in Laura Esquivel’s *La ley del amor*³³, in which an aboriginal woman raped by a conquistador is reincarnated as a man decades later. She dominates the conquistador who

³⁰ Imbert, Patrick (1995). «Le processus d’attribution», dans *Les discours du Nouveau Monde au XIX^e siècle au Canada français et en Amérique latine/Los discursos del Nuevo Mundo en el siglo XIX en el Canadá francófono y en América latina* (Couillard/Imbert, dir.), Ottawa, Legas, p. 43-60.

³¹ Castillo Durante, Daniel (2000). *Los vertederos de la postmodernidad: literatura, cultura y sociedad en América Latina*, Ottawa/Mexico, Dovehouse Editions Canada/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

³² Martel, Yann (1996). *Self*, Toronto, Knopf. (Éditions en français: 1994, Montréal, XYZ; 1998, Montréal, Boréal.)

³³ Esquivel, Laura (1996). *The Law of Love*, New York, Crown.

is now a woman. Reincarnations dramatize power struggles that endure into the 20th century. The deconstruction of character in the novel form reveals unexpected outcomes, a type of invisible hand or an unconscious in which the individual character does not mingle with a collective unconscious, but with historical determinations that evolve and lead to the exploration of racist and mimetic meanings attributed to reincarnations. These latter are not at all situated in a framework of Eastern philosophy, where the stasis of social structures can be overcome in the next life, but rather in the importance of a body undergoing the ravages of mimetic struggles, on emotional, sexual and intellectual levels.

Most of all, novels based on the idea of reincarnation indicate to their readers that they do not replicate society. This is contrary to the realistic novel so in demand by a public accustomed to a realistic aesthetic, an audience schooled by a pedagogical system chronically behind the times. These novels of reincarnation highlight the dynamics of the mimesis of appropriation, that is the ways in which we establish reality and the type of reality. Andrew McKenna shows this in *On Violence and Theory*³⁴. The body in the process of reincarnation therefore permits an exploration of the permutations of impersonal actions in which the character does not reveal him/herself, and also highlights multiple self-images in relation to those of others in the context of a generalized mimesis of appropriation, where, in order to stop producing victims, it becomes necessary to put oneself literally in another's place, in the destitution before power, a mode that French-Canadian author Gabrielle Roy conveyed through traditional novelistic technique in *Rue Deschambault*³⁵.

The body is thus part of the local, framed in a delineated territory that nowadays in certain social classes or in the world of many youths, springs from a space opened by reflexivity. This reflexivity relocates it and forces encounters with diverse cultures, a dynamic transforming the vision of self from an identity to a self-image able to connect efficiently with different context. The aforementioned works of Iyer, Martel, and Roy, seek to avoid producing new victims. This can be achieved if the images of self are multiplied and diverse contexts are crossed. In other words, from a democratic and liberal viewpoint, we manage to divide responsibilities and to multiply objects of desire that are the issues underlying struggles promising the actualization of a desire. For this, it is as necessary to escape a narrowed concept of a zero-sum territorial logic just as a belief in the stereotype of life as a zero-sum game. This obviously occurs on an economic level, as well as on a symbolic or emotional level, and reveals the mimetic struggles, in particular the usually hidden situation underlying the national or ethnic consensus that pits all against all and that chooses as a victim a person that differs in appearance. This person differs by physical attributes such as skin colour, pronunciation, or a physical anomaly³⁶.

³⁴ Andrew McKenna, 'On violence and Theory', in *Philosophical Designs for a Socio-Cultural Transformation* (T. Yamamoto et alii), Tokyo, Rowman and Littlefield, 1998, p. 656-666.

³⁵ Roy, Gabrielle (1993). *Rue Deschambault*, Montréal, Boréal compact (éd. originale 1972).

³⁶ See Annie-Lise Clément, *Le Marais* du réalisateur québécois Kim Nguyen : un bouleversement mythique passionnel dramatisant la pensée de René Girard. Passions in

Nonetheless, the person is menacing because she reveals the struggle of everyone against everyone else that every member of the consensus masquerading as consensus tries to conceal thanks to a belief in a shared culture and language. Because the marked other cannot pretend to share the same culture, the same language, he exposes his game, that of a hand tended towards the object everyone desires. He thus reveals to the others what he sought to hide, namely the process of the mimesis of appropriation itself hidden in what is the foundation of the consensus: the agreement on culture that is on representation itself based on the Platonic mimesis. This capacity to conceal this dynamic allows one to live in the hope that one's dreams of well-being will come true. By rejecting this other, those who do so and resemble him because all share the mimetic appropriative impulse, try to disguise that they struggle against everyone else in order to safeguard the fiction of the consensus that constructs identity and an illusion of a protective environment.

Conclusion

We can see that the natural world is the most relevant anchor to a culture that contains the dynamic of the mimesis of appropriation and its emergence in the victimary process. Reflection on this process is what permits its partial deactivation, especially if we understand that, in our times, power comes from the same status as the victim seeking reparation and protection in his victimized world. Nowadays, victimhood and its corollary of resentment underly the discourses of power that permit the projection of one's own violence onto others. Reflexivity on the processes and the promotion of values such as spatial and creative (not territorial) expansion of the individual in questioning of stereotypes such as the belief in the zero-sum game, to approach a creativity that works in concert with a chameleon's capacity to cross contexts, might permit escape from the most pernicious forms of violence. Love in the sense Jesus practised seems generous amongst the monochromatic rivalries of those blind to the many colours of a rainbow.

All rights reserved Patrick Imbert 2004.