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Reflection on the Crisis of Representation after the Bosnian War

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the notion of "representation" as it has developed in the domain of post-colonialism and Cultural Studies over the last decade or two. Using the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina as an example, the author probes both the pseudo-colonial representations of the country in the western media and narratives and the academic criticism of these practices. With regards to the latter, the author maintains that critique of "representation" must be "depoliticized" and fully restored to the domain of "culture." The politicized variant of the postmodern or postcolonial, where "representation" ultimately gets to be debunked as a sinister and injurious undertaking is criticized as overly simplicistic. This central argument is examined through three different angles, termed as *positioning*, *imagining* and *experiencing*, all aiming to demonstrate that "identity" (as that thing which is supposedly injured by "representation") belongs to the intimate, not political, sphere of existence, which in turn questions the validity of politicized criticism of representation.

Keywords:

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Balkans

representation

cultural studies

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Introduction

Where did everyone go? -- said a perplexed news cameraman who came in too late. The scene is a broad, muddy swath of land between Kosovo and Macedonia, in the morning of April 7, 1999. The no-man's land is completely empty, except for countless piles of litter and excrement. Days before that, however, it was swarmed by more than 40,000 Kosovar refugees who had run for their lives in whichever direction the crowd was moving. Stuck in the mud, cold rain, with no food, water or any humanly sanitation -- but with plenty of international media coverage -- the horrified refugees patiently waited to be taken anywhere. And then, overnight, they just vanished, on their way toward the Albanian coast, leaving the journalists to make their stories out of the fascinating void itself (Hozić 2000: 239).

Thus the Balkans went out of focus and out of fashion: first, as a theatre of mind-boggling violence and "politics of organized madness"[1]; and second, as a wildly exhilarating playground of Western representations and metaphors, of almost unprecedented proportions. Six years on, with E.U. soldiers having replaced their NATO predecessors, and dragging their drab and bloodless peacekeeping mission toward a gradual closure, the interest in the broader area (along with Central and Eastern Europe) seems to have been a part of that strange interlude in history when, in the words of a Philip Roth's recent fictional character, "we

[1]The phrase was concocted by Zbigniew Brzezinski. He saw this as one of five characteristics of every twentieth-century totalitarianism (1993). I am borrowing this expression and using it in a different, if not opposite, context: in the area in question this is something that actually came about with the advent of democracy.

were no longer afraid of communists and not yet afraid of terrorists"[2], and in which the public at large could afford to devote many months of unswerving attention to the aftermath of one sexual encounter at the White House. To be sure, bevies of young American *expats* -- the word is supposed to designate persons fleeing in direction opposite to that of immigrants (such as myself) -- are still attracted to the rediscovered glitter of places like Prague or Budapest. However, and this is particularly important, they are not going there to reinvent themselves in some Hemingwayesque way (as their more romantic grandparents would perhaps expect); even less as sundry Victorian explorers and adventurers (to whom I shall occasionally return here) -- but to throw themselves into quite practical, mundane activities, such as teaching English to the fledgling local businessmen, or, alternatively, to take part in some of the EU-sponsored NGO programs such as, say, empowerment of women in Bosnia.

This turnabout is important because it changes the key in which we normally employ concepts like "(de)colonization" or "representation" and engage with other issues around the "identity politics" complex. While this in no way means that typical themes of economic, cultural and political colonization are off the agenda, on the contrary, it is undeniable that the *presence of the exotic*, which is essential for these mental operations, has become somewhat dubious; and, to put it more precisely, has become such in a mere decade's span.

In this sense, much of what I aim at here is a matter of a "past", but still apart from conventionally understood history; not because we are dealing with a part of the world in which past notoriously resists being "shelved" and thus committed to history. Rather, the *pastness* of the matter at hand, in my view, arises from two conflating, but different factors; somewhat reminiscent of Erik Erikson's pioneering explorations of identity as "something that is both *psycho* and *social*" (Erikson 1975: 18), depending on both (in his terms) "life history" and the

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[2]From the introductory narrator's monologue in the movie *Human Stain* (2003), based on the novel by Philip Roth.

"historical moment". On the one hand, the sense of the closure in question, arises from changes in the broader, global parameters, which should become clearer if we recall that the world-historical flux always contains certain "joints", interruptions, which radically change the concepts defined in the preceding epoch, and that we have in the meantime moved past at least one such joint[3]. On the other hand, it springs from my own experience of a migrant that has necessarily and inevitably taken my native area from the "reality", with its own cultural and power-related issues, to the vague domain of memory. Simply put, the country in which I am no longer a taxpayer -- however "mine" it might be -- will inevitably become (why not admit it right away?) an "object of representation" even for myself.

Ensuing from this logic, I would like to think of the chapters that follow as a sort of subsequent, or second-order re-examination of the perceptions and representations of the events that took place in my country of origin over the past decade and more; second-order because I will discuss works that aim at critique of those representations, some of which were also written during that time. Next, I would like to, as much as possible, skirt round the specific demands of specialistic area studies: although I am aware that some of my commentary will necessarily be "specialized" -- that is, dealing with specific problems of a specific part of the world -- it is more in line with my intent to approach this problem by way of what postmodern anthropology recognized (and sociology followed suit) as "reflexivity", more precisely the procedures of "positioning" or "situating" the

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[3]It is common among historians to demarcate centuries with such nexus-events, making some of them "long" (if the start-end events are more than 100 years apart, like the French Revolution and the World War I in case of the 19th century), and others "short" (from World War I to the end of Cold War in case of the 20th). Arguably, there are many such events in between as well: here, of course, I am alluding on September 11, 2001 as one such event, or cluster of events, if we also count the subsequent US-led engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq into it. If nothing else, insofar as we now have a White House without sexual scandals but with sort-of reincarnations of Nixon and Kissinger in it instead, one must conclude that all the *'grand narratifs'* of the 1990s -- globalization, decentralization, neo-liberalism, 'dot-com', loose-networked corporations... *and*, of course, identity-politics, protected minorities, postcoloniality and so forth -- are shaken in their foundations. That is not to say that I am declaring them obsolete, but they probably must undergo a certain theoretical reconsideration.

self. By saying this I find myself sliding along with Edward Said's perpetual fascination with one "hauntingly beautiful passage" that he was "returning again and again to". Coming down to him by way of his great mentor (and one of the pioneers of "representation" theme in the modern western scholarship), Erich Auerbach, it was originally penned by Hugo of St. Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony:

> It is therefore, a source of great virtue for the practiced mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about in visible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his. [quoted in Said 1993: 335]

* * *

"It is now almost impossible," Said noted some eighteen years ago, speaking at an anthropological session devoted to himself[4], "to remember a time when people were *not* talking about crisis in representation" (Said 1989: 205). The more this crisis is analyzed and discussed, the earlier its origins seem to be, he added, citing Foucault and earlier literary historians Wasserman, Auerbach and Abrams -- all of them having intimated, each in their own way, "that with the erosion of the classical consensus, words no longer comprised a transparent medium through which Being shone" (1989: 206).

A couple of decades later, it seems easier -- instead of digging ever deeper into the past -- to look into the future in which everybody will simply get fed up "talking about crisis in representation". To me, this future seems imminent, which

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[4]The session of the American Anthropological Association, entitled "Anthropology's Interlocutors: Edward Said and the Representations of the Colonized", took place at the Association's annual meeting in Chicago on 21 November 1987. The text of the address was published in 1989.

I will try to expand to some extent again in my conclusion. Today, namely, the very concept of "representation" seems worn-out, run over, ground, chopped and gnashed to and over the edge of theorizing fatigue. Nonetheless, I am determined to make every effort to approach it here with some -- I hope -- clearly visible ambition.

At this point I should probably account for a somewhat unorthodox composition of this thesis. The reader will be at pains to locate the standard parts of the argument in it: the (1) literature review/introduction/theoretical framework, then (2) application/case study and then (3) conclusion. Hoping that I might be allowed to hide behind what Ernesto Laclau said in his preface to the first Slavoj Žižek's book in English (1989: xii), I might say that it is decidedly not a classical dissertation; that is

> a systematic structure in which an argument is developed according to a predetermined plan. Nor is it a collection of essays, each of which constitutes a finished product and whose "unity" with the rest is merely the result of its thematic discussion of a common problem. It is rather a series of theoretical interventions which shed mutual light on each other, not in terms of the *progression* of an argument, but in terms of what we could call *reiteration* of the latter in different discursive context. [Laclau, in Žižek 1989: xii]

Although I do draw on Žižek's ideas, here and there (particularly in the second chapter), it is not my ambition of course to compare myself to my celebrated ex-countryman. First of all, this thesis is *not* a philosophical text; at least I don't see it as such. While there admittedly are some parts of the argument, especially in the opening chapter and conclusion, that *may sound* like philosophy, this was almost against my intention. Rather, I was "drawn" into it, simply because I had to sort out certain issues to myself.

My central proposition is that *critique of representation* must be "depoliticized" and fully restored to the domain of "culture." What is meant by this? While in the politicized variant of the postmodern/poststructuralist/postcolonial intellectual trajectory "representation" ultimately gets to be debunked as a

sinister and injurious undertaking, aimed at cementing imperialistic hegemony. I intend to test "my own story" against both such position and its available refutations. In a sense, what is proposed is basically backtracking in Said's footsteps[5]: where he proceeds from Auerbach via Foucault to politically *engagé* advocacy on behalf of colonized minorities, I would like to go in reverse; but carefully, so as not to throw the baby out with the bathwater but rather to examine the procedure itself and its consequences -- while looking from specific Balkan angle.

There is a number of contemporary developments and schools of thought to draw on in articulating the point, since the proposition comes with admixtures of several issues and analytical foci within the central one. I may start by pointing out at Rojek's and Turner's important paper on "decorative sociology" (2000). Roughly speaking, they describe the phenomenon (the phrase is meant as serious term, not disparagement) as a degenerative procedure in which "culture" has eclipsed the "social" and where the tools of literary criticism are being used instead of conventional sociological methods. I could not agree more. But that is also the point where I depart from them: while they make the case for return to the methods, I look into that depoliticized cultural remainder. To put it quite bluntly -- and this is not Rojek's and Turner's thesis but my own twist of it -- the cause of the Palestinian people *cannot* be advanced by a professor of comparative literature from New York. The professor, however, *can* advance our own comprehension of the Palestinian people, by increasing the sophistication of the "gaze," making it multipolar/multidirectional and accommodating it to accept those aspects of its "object" that have become more complicated since the nineteenth century. Rojek and Turner take aim mainly at the British cultural studies of the Birmingham school (where the most distinct imprint left is that of Stuart Hall) but

[5]Obviously I am only using Said's name as a sort of convenient metonymy for a process that is much broader than his own work.

much of their argument also applies to the French-influenced American "identitarianism" in its feminist, post-colonial and other articulations.

While this objection may be dubbed as *methodological* (for Rojek and Turner argue toward a more orthodox cultural sociology, citing Elias, Sennett and Bourdieu as their own role models of disciplinary excellence), the one that comes next is *political.* Broadly speaking, this argument maintains that identity politics -- which in this case is to be understood as politically charged critique of representation, along the line of the already outlined advocacy on behalf of symbolically vulnerable identities -- in its ultimate consequence carries the abolition of politics proper. Over the last ten years the leftist designs based on politicizing the "minor" identities have come under attack from multiple directions. The earliest criticisms, coming from "expected trench" of conservative Right (not to mention sundry European and Russian fascist groups), remained less problematic[6] than those more recent ones, from either the radical[7] or moderate Left[8]. The way this argument essentially runs is as follows: as social rights (largely sapped with the neo-liberal market fundamentalism) get replaced with cultural rights, cultures and identities enter the political field, announcing themselves through the language of human rights, which, since the collapse of revolution, has acquired a sort of exclusive hold on the articulation of protest. At the same time, bureaucratically imposed rules of political correctness generate a "new utopia", displaying a number of quasi-communist traits -- first and most important of which is that these "human rights" are something quite different from the eighteenth-century "rights of man", devised as limitation of the state power over the individual. This new

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[6]For example, in his *Clash of Civilizations* Samuel Huntington charges that a "small but influential number of intellectuals and publicists [has attacked], in the name of multiculturalism, the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other subnational cultural identities and groupings" (Huntington 1995: 305).

[7]For this view I draw on Žižek (1998), whose point is expanded in conclusion.

[8]A relatively recent gist of the debate (particularly ebullient in France) may be found in Finkielkraut, Gauchet and Manent (2004).

understanding of rights is not about setting limits of any kind, but about another historical "Grand March", in the name of equality, diversity and justice, whose drummers are able to anachronize their opponents and commit them to "junkyard of history"[9].

This point, however, much like the previous one, only incidentally overlaps with my discussion and I "touch base" with it in the first chapter following this introduction and then again in the conclusion. My own take of the problem is more in line with the presumed separateness of the "public" and "private" dimensions of existence, where identity -- quite self-evidently, insofar as it is something each of us builds and constructs for him/herself -- belongs to the latter sphere. In that respect, I offer three different "reiterations" of the argument, terming them as *positioning, imagining* and *experiencing*. These are just technical terms that will only be explained in their respective chapters.

I start out from what has become a conventional point of departure in today's "reflexive" social sciences: positioning the Self, that is explaining where the researcher himself "sits" in the picture. Here I cannot avoid, even if I wanted to, the intricacies of my immigrant's existence. An immigrant, that strange creature into which "we tend to invest all the evils of the city" as Julia Kristeva said (1991), bears in him certain, so to speak, theoretical advantages. He can easily switch between being both "subject" and "object" -- something I play with ad nauseam in the next chapter -- decentre and recentre himself at will. For Said, he is no less than the *real* locus of postmodernity. Dismissing, in his characteristic

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[9]As Canadians we must of course stress that much of this discussion is specifically European and cannot be mechanically applied to Canadian situation. Two political differences are particularly prominent. First, Canadian multiculturalism is "organic", historically stemming from *internal* "identitary" strife between its own two linguistic groups and *only after that* from post-colonial realities of immigration. (In 1971 the policy of multiculturalism came about as a natural successor to a decade older concept of "biculturalism".) Second, in Europe the leftist identity politics goes hand in hand with *regionalization* -- a process subverting the very core of its traditional nation-states -- causing a great deal of irritation and trepidation of nationalistic backlash. In Canada -- which has never in its history been more than a loose confederacy of its regions, its central government dependent on intricate compromises in order to operate -- this problem does not exist in such manner.

righteous thunder, Lytoard's famous thesis about ideological *grands récits* being replaced by local *petits récits,* he says that the former have "lost their legitimation as a result of crisis of modernism, which foundered on or was frozen in contemplative irony for various reasons of which one was the disturbing appearance in Europe of various Others, whose provenance was the imperial domain" (1989: 222). After all, the story of the most famous Balkan *Orientalist* novel, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* -- lest we forget (as we always do) -- begins with the villain's wish to purchase for himself a piece of property in an upscale London neighbourhood. That is the source of real fright.

In "choreographing" this dance of self-positioning, however, I mainly rely on Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical" model of symbolic interactionism. That is, I am going way into the past, beyond Said, Lyotard and others; moving away from texts and getting, one might say, into (or close to) furrow ploughed by Rojek and Turner. The purpose of the move is in my wish to examine to what extent these eminently postmodern themes can be "treated" with some older theoretical models, placing them *vis-à-vis* these newer ones.

The subject of the second chapter is imagining. Starting from a remarkable story told by a judge serving with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to an American magazine writer, I examine the crucial ancillary notions surrounding representation -- that is, "imagining" and "gaze". I begin with some discussions about the Balkan variant of Orientalist imagining developed in the 1990s and then continue with Foucault's well-known analysis of Velàzquez' painting *Maids of Honour.* This is followed by corresponding dissection of two more images: a photo snapshot of my own and Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring,* inspired by the judge's story. The crux of the concluding theoretical argument is in difference between Foucauldian and Lacanian notion of gaze, which I draw from Žižek.

In the third chapter I turn to events in war-time Bosnia that I term as "struggle against metaphor" (although there are also examples that witness to the

opposite behaviour, say, pleasure in the metaphor). The main part of the chapter is an unusual "second-order" thick description of Susan Sontag's production of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* with a Sarajevo theatre company in 1993. Again, similarly to Rojek's and Turner's demand to move away from text (although I did not have them in mind when I first wrote this) I discuss notions of metaphor, and intellectuals' *engagement,* in the French sense of the word, that is "commitment to the metaphor", by way of imitating -- rather than strictly practicing -- a conventional method.

Finally, in conclusion, I return to offer some additional general discussion of representation as a concept and its pitfalls.

1. Positioning: Emergence of a "Minor" Self

It is a late afternoon in 1996, our first winter in Canada. T. silently pulls me by the hand toward the bathroom door, through which we peep at our unsuspecting six-year-old. Staring at the mirror and vigorously pressing the heals of his palms against his temples, he is apparently trying to make his eyes look "Chinese". Standing dumbfounded, I wonder: Is it really this early in life that we start developing "racial self-consciousness"? Possibly, but perhaps not quite like that. A few days later I attend the meet-the-teacher night at his school and I realize that he is one of the two white kids in his first grade class; if there is something he has become "conscious" of, therefore, it is his deviance, or the idea of what it means to be a part of "minority".

The school is an "inner city" one (at the moment I have yet to learn the meaning of the term and hence the quotation marks), but in a cute little building, staffed with nice and friendly, if markedly ill-groomed people, many of them overweight -- which I can't help noticing -- except for the principal himself, a thirtyish man of elaborate manners, with an inescapable (and properly stereotypical, we might say) Italian's touch of sartorial elegance.

As I step into the classroom the garrulous teacher shakes my hand and says:

-- Your boy has had some quite interesting experiences.

-- Well... yes, probably -- I reply, and my mind drifts away in a rapid stream of images. He is a baby-turning-toddler, and I find him in his terrified mother's arms, inside a closet, hidden among heavy winter coats that were somehow supposed to protect them from flying splinters. I have just come back home, but the house was empty with all doors wide open; as T. recovers from the state of shock and gradually stops shivering, I learn that I had missed the shelling by about half an hour. Days later, I see them go away, waving from the back seat of my friend's car; next time I see them, he is almost two years old. The first thing that comes to my mind is that he doesn't look like himself; he looks more like my own childhood photographs...

But the teacher draws me back; she hasn't finished her sentence yet:

-- For instance, he tells me he's been riding on the LRT.

I don't get her point. What is so exciting about riding on the subway train? Later that night I arrive at a conclusion that these people must consider it rather deviant for married thirty-somethings with small children (including even those from the "inner city") to use the public transportation; to not *own a car...*

The Vicissitudes of the Stressed-out Self

According to one humorous definition, "identity" is like a cellular phone: we carry it around with us, but we only become aware of it when it rings (Billig 1995). The aphorism, however, comes with a certain ambiguity that we usually take for granted, but which sometimes needs to be spelled out nonetheless. *One way* we may read this quip into the context is that "cultures", as containers of our group identity, render themselves to our sight with the ultimate effervescence precisely during funny misunderstandings in daily situations, such as these. Often exploited in contemporary migrant/postcolonial writing, where intimate personal narratives grow like underbrush around deserted edifices of Theory and History, it is here where the small-scale "clashes of civilizations" occur, rather than among states and military alliances. Whether we want to call this writing postmodern, deconstructionist or something alike, is less important at this point. First we need to refer to the

other way that ringing of the cellular phone may sound to us -- unpleasant, repulsive, offensive; reminding us of being an object of dominant culture's "representation", that is, a victim of some intangible but still clear and present injustice. Often exploited in contemporary migrant/postcolonial cultural criticism, where "representation" supplants and expands the older notion of "ideology", it seeks to rectify the dominant culture's misrepresentations of workers, women, people of colour and other "subaltern" groups (Bracher 1993: 9).

This chapter will focus on this essential ambiguity, the locus of splitting and doubling of the subject-object relation in a sort of altered private/public opposition; into *intimate* and *"political"*, power-laden, dimensions. Let us start by examining the above parable about the boy, his father and schoolteacher more closely, testing it along the way against a few theoretical models, both classic and more recent ones.

In the first part of the story a little boy is annoyed with perceived physical difference that divides him from others; placing itself as frustrating obstacle between himself and his life-world as his paramount reality, or the "archetype of his experience of reality" (Alfred Schutz, quoted in Ritzer 1992: 322). Put simply, he runs into a painful obstruction between himself and his need to *belong;* to be a part of, to not stand out. But while experiencing primordial multiplication and differentiation of social realities in which he exists -- one within the family, one on the street block and one in the school -- the boy simultaneously starts developing, we may guess, some sort of rudimentary awareness of the *fixity* of the racial club membership. With zero-degree freedom of entrance and exit, this type of belonging is obviously a "given"; that is, it generally cannot be changed at will (unless one is bent on doing something quite drastic, like Michael Jackson).

However, there are at least two other -- and much less innocent -- aspects that he won't be able to grasp until much later in the process of his educational formation. First, he has as yet no idea that he is actually the lucky one, a member of the privileged colour, who will have to endure far less pressure from prejudicial stereotyping than those who constitute the mainstream of his current life-world.

And then still later, he will learn that this "given" is not a positive given, that is, some objective piece of data. Rather, the "given" is something stamped onto him by others, something we call "representation"[10]. Only at this advanced level of development the taken-for-granted "given" will take off from the ground, to become a "discursive formation" whose "performative power" may come to question the "materiality of the body." The positive fact of physical appearance will now acquire its double, a shadow of fantasy: a form of "narcissistic, and aggressive identification available to the Imaginary" but "within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical conjuncture, [...] always problematic -- the site of both fixity and fantasy" (Bhabha 1994: 77).

The second situation is still more complex. At the first glance we have two persons -- the boy's father and the teacher -- between whom the circuit of symbolic interaction cannot be fully closed, because of being too messed up by cultural differences. The "systems of representation" or the "frames of reference" that they draw on in attempt to make sense to each other will eventually "connect", but with a lot of "noise". Put on other available terms, the culturally induced impossibility of the *verstehen* or hermeneutical cycle between interlocutors results in an ostensibly delightful comedy of errors. But, just as in the previous case, this is only the surface layer. A deeper analysis with some added imagination may crack open the glossy shell of "communicative action" and reveal something considerably more sinister underneath. Let's take a look.

The teacher is confused, although perhaps not quite intimidated, but clearly ill at ease with the man in front of her. Driven by her Christian ethics, which provides her not only with a sense of purpose, but also with clear representations

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[10]Parenthetically, it becomes arguable that even Michael Jackson's undertaking in this respect is deeply absurd because an alteration of "objective" appearance does not necessarily have to affect the representation. Rather, it is only *at play* with representation, as a sort of politicized fashion statement -- although admittedly a very loud one. Still, in order to eschew possible exaggerations, one should not assume that representation is fully resistant to such a dramatic change in appearance: most of those who'd bother about such things would be at pains, I presume, to offer a simple and straightforward answer about Michael Jackson's race or even gender. But that is precisely what the "statement" is about.

of the poor, the "needy", the "less fortunate" and so on -- she has developed some pretty straightforward expectations of her (stereo)typical inner-city clients. Now, all of a sudden, instead of society's docile, grateful "losers"[11], she must deal with this arrogant "smartass", who is, with everything he says, with every bit his body language gives away, so painfully in violation of all these expectations.

The man's own comprehension of his poverty is straightforwardly Marxist, of course -- which in this context only means *not at all* Christian, and providing him with ability to handle it with a sense of "performative" Brechtian cynicism. He grew up in a conflictual, small-pond-with-many-sharks culture, where limited opportunities (if not outright poverty) always went hand in hand with certain intellectual arrogance, awash in sarcasm and derision. Drawing heavily on this "archaic self", on what he is no more, he now looks condescendingly at this overgrown *ingénue* in front of him, thinking of those insufferable women he has seen on morning television, their style marked by uncontrolled proliferation of extreme adjectives ("fantastic", "fabulous", "gorgeous" and so on), which they apply on weather conditions or on things like cakes and flower pots.

After a very long while the man replays the situation in his memory. However, it is now blended with some readings on European colonial expansion -- exposure to which somehow also triggers in him recollection of the "road movies" he had been so fascinated with in his distant youth. From here he reconstructs the situation differently, developing a more proper appreciation of his

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[11]Of course, "loser" too is a *symbolic*, not economic or class/status label. In my understanding the "loser" is basically someone who either deliberately *rejects* or accidentally *wanders off* the righteous path of "pursuit of happiness." The difference is reminiscent of Hans Mayer's classic distinction between "intentional" and "existential" outsiders (Mayer 1982), but the notion of outsider is not fully correspondent with that of the loser, an endemic American creature. *Outsider* is stripped of agency and fully pre-defined by the structure, always on the basis of collective identity -- going from medieval/early modern triplet of the woman, the Jew and the homosexual (Mayer, Delumeau 1978); and then branching out to a multitude of racialized postcolonial (or such) figures: a Turkish *Gastarbeiter* in Germany; a "Paki" immigrant in England; a black kid from Harlem sidewalk and so on. *Loser*, on the other hand, repetitively strives and fails; he therefore comes to us with a certain small-time tragic dimension. (It is small wonder, for instance, that Americans are so impressed by Anton Chekhov, that arch-poet of losers, whom they in some ways "understand" even better than Russians themselves.)

erstwhile hostess's "open frontier" culture, particularly its emphasis on *adventure.* The meaning of a movement, for instance, is not merely in physical repositioning from point A to point B, but also in savouring the space between them -- much like in the words of a Sam Shepard's dramatic character, reminiscing of a forlorn love relationship, in which "everything, even a trip to a local grocery store, was full of adventure" *(Paris, Texas* 1984). Only after such relaxation of the *verstehen,* the man is able to understand that the child's boasting about a trip on the subway train was not mentioned to remind him of his inability to afford his own car (as suggested to him by his injured *amour-propre),* but rather to *revoke one unusual adventure* -- which, in all likelihood, is precisely what had been on the child's mind in the first place.

Thus, it now appears, while struggling against perceived misrepresentation and elbowing his way into the spotlight of recognition, the man had actually pushed his own child to darkness -- the unlit part of the stage. The suggestion may be a bit too harsh to accept, of course, but the purpose of this example is served well: by -- first of all -- introducing three "characters" into the situation instead of just two, this purpose is to avoid Manichaean binary opposition sets and illuminate the intrinsic complexity of the multicultural encounters, which, in my experience, make it increasingly difficult to keep reducing these relations to their power-related facet by continuing to *represent the concept of representation* as a sort of Tom-and-Jerry combat between the "stupid white men" (to borrow from a popular satirical title) and their sundry victims, as found in much of contemporary theorizing of the cultural struggle.

Discovery of the "Infinitely Small": Focus on Goffman

The given interpretation of the scene between the child's father and the teacher makes it fairly obvious that, by way of ostentatious caricaturing of his situation and social position (or at least his own retro-imagining of doing so) the man had engaged it by "queering" it: by bringing out its "performative" nature -- using the

terms, *mutatis mutandis,* in the way slightly modified from the one in which they have generally been used after Judith Butler (1993: 1-16). In his own subsequent understanding, however, the man's act appears more like being reduced to its "dehumanized ideological mask," by "taking it more literally than it is ready to take itself" (Žižek 1997: 77); an operation that might be called *"literalizing"* -- the opposite of ironizing.

But, insofar as this intimate or *pre-political* aspect of the cynicism (still fitting into the "private sphere of the lifeworld") is all we are worried about, a well-rounded interpretive framework is already available in much older (and by all means more approachable), classical models. Let us turn to Erving Goffman's "dramaturgical" schema, to which I shall then pay some sustained attention throughout this section:

> When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical, reserving the term "sincere" for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance. It should be understood that the cynic, with all his professional disinvolvement, may obtain unprofessional pleasures from his masquerade, *experiencing a kind of gleeful spiritual aggression from the fact that he can toy at will with something his audience must take seriously*. [Goffman 1959: 18, emphasis added]

Evidently, Goffman does not yet feel the necessity to take multiple "cultures" and power-sensitive group identities into account. Here, it is still possible to euphemize the representation's sado-masochistic capability as "a kind of gleeful spiritual aggression" -- given not as *re*-presentation, but as self's own presentation in front of social audience, and without regard to the pressure that goes in the opposite direction -- *from* the structure, empowered to decide what is "normal," *to* the individual agency. However, while it does forecast it historically (in terms of development of sociological theory), the "dramaturgical" is *not yet* the "performative". First, the drama is still confinable, or almost confinable, to the limits of the bourgeois drawing-room comedy; speaking from theatrical (dramatic) universe, we are still in company of Oscar Wilde, quite far from German

expressionism, or, say, the young Eugene O'Neill[12]. And second -- making another foray into Butler's language -- this would still correspond to an *act* by which "a subject brings into being what she or he names", not yet the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 1993: 2); the man in the story is, of course, quite far from being in control of any kind of discourse.

The point that the dramaturgical/performative parallel, or, rather, sequence, seeks to illustrate may be brought about in a number of ways. Here, I will mostly remain with Goffman's two works from nearly half a century ago (1959, 1963). This may seem like a rather arbitrary pick, and it probably is. Even so, it seems to me that Goffman's model and his subsequent interest in deviance represent a nexus that at the same time not only consolidates the symbolic interactionist tradition into several straightforward statements but also -- more importantly to me -- lay groundwork for future explorations of representation and associated concepts such as "politics of identity" (a phrase he had, after all, invented himself [1963: 123]) along with corresponding importations from British cultural studies and French post-structuralism, which would take place much after his death in 1982. For starters, it should be recalled here that Europeans have generally paid relatively little attention to both symbolic interactionism, as a school of thought, and to its philosophical "parent", pragmatism. Even some Americans were until relatively recently quick to dismiss it as "parochial and in-bred" (Fine 1993: 65). But there are illustrious exceptions too. Thus Pierre Bourdieu paid an important tribute to Goffman in an obituary written for *Le Monde* daily (Bourdieu 1983), which prompted some critics to sardonically comment that the Frenchman was

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[12]Although I have provided a hint of such an outcome at the end of my story by furnishing Goffman's metaphor with something it doesn't originally have. In addition to actors themselves, Goffman speaks of props and costumes, but he never mentions the *directorial* element -- in my example represented by stage lighting. Since Director is the very Demiurg of Power Discourse Master, the one who goes beyond actor's will to decide what is *on-stage;* an 'active', seen (lit), part of the stage, and what is not -- it seems only logical that there is no place for him or her in Goffman's schema.

actually indebted to the American even more than he would readily admit (see Jenkins 1992: 19)[13]. Still more interesting, in my view, is certain ignorance, or forgetting, on the other side: the American (and Canadian) neglect of these links that came with the massive "French takeover" of North American academic theorizing in the 1990s, initially propelled by feminists and post-colonialists. To be sure, there is a considerable literature devoted to these connections, particularly (or so it seems) from earlier 1990s (Denzin 1992, Fine 1993, McCall and Becker 1990). By contrast, only a few years earlier, Bourdieu's chief proponent in the United States, Loïc Wacquant (1989: 29-30), complained about "hegemony of American sociology" resulting in a sort of dogmatic arrogance and "intellectual ethnocentrism", which, according to him, left most American theorists utterly incapable of understanding someone like Bourdieu.[14]

Bourdieu, in turn, described Goffman as the master of the "infinitely small" in sociology: walking, standing, modes of speech, body language; "the prudent banalities that pass between two strangers in the train"; the more or less mundane stuff that constitutes intimate, corporeal aspects of our "identity," of who we are:

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[13]However, it is Jürgen Habermas who has probably been the most consistent in taking the Americans seriously, seeing their work as remedy against "democratic deficiency" of the European Left. As he told an interviewer in 1986: "From the outset I viewed American pragmatism as the third productive reply to Hegel, after Marx and Kierkegaard, as the radical-democratic branch of young Hegelianism, so to speak. Ever since, I have relied on this American version of the philosophy of praxis when the problem arises of compensating for the weaknesses of Marxism with respect to democratic theory" (quoted in Morris 1991: 348).

[14]Despite that, here, I again draw on personal experience. As I entered the Master's program in Sociology, and commenced my first theory course, I knew little (next to nothing to be quite honest) about symbolic interactionism, as it had never been taught to me. By contrast, I brought in some modest "dowry" in terms of exposure to French structuralism, post-structuralism and postmodernism, which was a sort of fashionable café topic during my earlier career in the mid- to late 1980s. Back then, however, we circulated it exclusively in the context of popular culture, literary criticism and performing arts and I had no idea that it might be used for the purposes of feminist or gay activism, let alone for the "Third World" attempts to dislocate Western hegemony. Thus I simultaneously explored these new uses of the "French modern" and approached Goffman "through the back door" -- only to discover that quite a bit of what my young peers *sought out* from Foucault, Derrida and others was already present in his work, only now expanded with much greater degree of philosophical sophistication. In fact, much of the theoretical discussion in this chapter arises from my own need to "sort out" this initial impression with myself.

> Through the subtlest, most fugitive indices of social interaction, he grasped the logic of the *work of representation;* that is to say, the whole set of strategies with which social subjects strive to construct their *identity*; to shape their social image, in a word, to produce a show. He regarded social subjects as actors who put on a performance and who, through a more or less sustained *mise en scène,* endeavour to show themselves off in the best light. [1983; italics in the original]

As stated, emphasis is Bourdieu's -- except maybe for the "mise en scène", French for "production" or "direction" in theatre and film. The translator, we may guess, wasn't sure how to reconciliate it with ambiguities and imprecisions of English; or there is a certain irony to be unleashed from under literal meaning of the phrase: "putting on stage". In any case, it also dovetails to my own musing about the absent director *("metteur en scène")* in Goffman's theoretical model. Now, what we can recognize right away, is that Bourdieu has italicized the two most cardinal concepts of postmodern/post-colonial theorizing *en gross*, but the context supplied by the rest of the paragraph still keeps them firmly intimate, apolitical, "small". In other words, while their presence presages trends with little or no patience for Goffman's fastidiousness (after the "French takeover"), there is still nothing here to hint toward a racialized, genderized or any other kind of *collective content* of either representation or identity.

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In *Stigma* (1963), Goffman looks at much gloomier aspects of the re-presentation, which is arguably what makes it somewhat more resonant with today's readers' sensibility. The pain of the stigmatized, of the one who must accept being banished as different, is under scrutiny, although we are still expected to complacently accept a society that infallibly decides what is "normal" and what is "deviant". Goffman's tales of deviant self-constitution, where a blind girl or a lame boy crippled by polio (1963: 74ff) feel sincerely ashamed and embarrassed by their condition may seem quite off-putting or even grotesque to us -- coming to full frontal collision with our own culturally constructed/politically corrected

understanding of people with disabilities. But the question of the capacity of the "subjectified" power-structure to define something as "deviant", although not yet specifically posed, had already started its sliding toward the focal point; what will come to the front is political charge, political "magnetization" of the stage as the field of interaction.

Of course, we all know that we don't live in some utopistically "corrected" time in which *stigmatization* has miraculously disappeared. But it is interesting to examine the social/sociological career of the idea. For Goffman, there are two "interior components" (Scheff 2001) that are either explicit or implied in his descriptions of social interaction: *embarrassment* or its anticipation, on the one hand, and thoughts about the thoughts of others *(intersubjectivity)*, on the other. These two interior components are closely related: feeling and avoiding embarrassment implies thoughts about others' thoughts about self. However, it is impossible to ignore how this relation has, in the meantime, become *politically operated* in a more explicit way. In this sense, we may start by looking to different historical memories. On the one hand, the normative omnipotency of the social power-structure to *force* an individual to be *ashamed* of him/herself for whatever reason, has typically been thought of as the ultimate totalitarian capability. As an East European born in third quarter of the twentieth century, I think of what I had read about Stalinist staged trials of the 1930s, where old revolutionaries willingly and with some uncanny zeal presented themselves as traitors and spies, placing themselves under the axe of revolution, almost taking perverted pleasure from the reiterative power of absurdity that sought to exclude them from the reality itself. On the other hand, in line with Foucauldian insights into capillary transformations of power and control -- and more in line with Western, particularly North American person's experience of their own society, normally relying on *losers* to act in lieu of traitors and dissidents -- the stigmatization has moved away from the traditional stereotyping and toward some very specific groups such as addicts or delinquents. For instance, much of the anti-

smoking propaganda today displays very visible traits of this nontraditional and thus artificial, targeted stigmatization: set apart from fiscal or legal measures (which simply make it *practically difficult* for people to buy cigarettes or find a place where to smoke) the operation also turns the "filthy habit" into something shameful. The accent is on this constructed moral dimension erected on the top of a certain perceived deficiency, which is what stigma is arguably all about. This is one constancy that largely remains the same from Goffman's time to our own.

With these examples we are able to discern contours of a broader, and more common thematic *Zeitgeist:* while Goffman, Fanon and Foucault were three very different men who rarely drew on one another's work, they were still contemporaries of almost the same generation, and at least some shadows of that fact are now becoming visible. Fanon's notion of the "white mask" of the dominant power-holder's culture being impressed on the "black face" of the colonized so profoundly that the latter learns how to accept it automatically, to the point of utterly despising himself and developing consequential psychosis, will be partially reflected in my discussion as well, and so will the subsequently developed "performativity" as a symptom of that psychosis. As I have already outlined, Goffman addresses the topic himself -- if admittedly staying well within the limits of bourgeois forbearance and away from any revolutionary histrionics: "I have suggested two extremes," he points out quite simply: "an individual may be *taken in by his own act* or be cynical about it" (1959: 19, emphasis added). One thing evinced by this difference is perhaps the much greater stability of Anglo-Saxon "civilization", compared to the French, during the last days of colonialism; and, as a logical consequence, much greater alacrity of the latter one's intellectual "culture"[15], leading to a much more radicalized social thought during the same period. In line with continuity from "dramaturgical" to "performative"

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[15]This remarkable correlation between terminal political sclerosis of an empire and flourishing intellectual life in its metropolis -- making way for the old, Spengler-style notions of 'civilization' and 'culture' as concept in mutual opposition or in zero-sum relation to each other -- had already been demonstrated before, perhaps most strikingly in the turn-of-the-century Vienna.

that I posited above, we find yet another enunciation of the latter in "minstrelization," a term Goffman borrowed from Anatole Broyard:

> Whether closely allied with his own kind or not, the stigmatized individual may exhibit identity ambivalence when he obtains a close sight of his own kind behaving in a stereotyped way, flamboyantly or pitifully acting out the negative attributes imputed to them. [...] He is likely to be warned against "minstrelization" whereby the stigmatized person ingratiatingly acts out before normals the full dance of bad qualities imputed to his kind, thereby consolidating a life situation into a clownish role. [Goffman 1963: 107, 110]

Politicizing the Intimate: from "Politics of Identity" to "Identity Politics"

How and in what circumstances will this intimate aspect, the metaphorical "politics of identity", come to the public spotlight and become "identity politics" -- a matter of "real" political struggle? How, in other words, does the "infinitely small" inflate to the size of the "infinitely large", coming, in the end, to formulate issues related to policy and governance (such as "diversity", "multiculturalism", "political correctness" and so on)? The question may be addressed from both *socio-political* and *epistemological/methodological* viewpoints, which today come intertwined so closely that we are often unable to tell them apart; the point that we miss in this misunderstanding is that this confluence itself is deeply historical in nature. For example, Seyla Benhabib, has recently (2002: 113-114) pointed out at five such socio-political/historical driving forces that propelled the steep ascent of identity politics in the 1990s. I will recount them one by one, flanking them with comments of my own, some to be expanded later in this thesis (bolded text is Benhabib's):

1. **Reverse globalization processes, through which non-Western immigrant communities settle in and confront themselves with the demands of liberal-democratic states:**

   - What one notices first is a matter of terminological choice: Benhabib says "reverse globalization" rather than "reverse colonization", perhaps a

more precise way to put it; mass migrations from "non-West" to "West" have been part of the latter's social reality at least since around 1960 -- pulled by the end of colonialism, tides of refugees and postwar labour shortages across much of Europe. The difference brought about by the new wave -- which is how the century's end differs from its middle -- is in much more complex "identitarian" content at *both* sides of the interaction. In case one also wonders about the difference between "globalization" (supposedly something quite new in history) and those notorious, intrinsic traits of capitalism from the opening pages of *Communist Manifesto,* the matter of ethnic identities will, sooner or later, turn up again.

2. **Geopolitical configurations after the end of communism in 1989 in eastern and central Europe and the emergence of nationalism as a force in formerly communist countries;**

- When we think of the last decade and political events that marked it, any number of things may pop up in our minds but two are most likely to be there: the rise of capitalist globalization and the end of communism in Eastern Europe, followed by the rise of nationalism. By now, apart from several isolated spots, nationalism in east-central Europe is either passé altogether or sidelined by other problems such as growing together of governments and crime rackets. However, any nationalism (including Nazism) is, *stricto sensu,* also a kind of identity politics. Conflation of rabid right-wing nationalism in the "non-West" and fluffy left-wing identity politics in the "West" (once they find some common grounds, usually in the emotionally charged anti-Americanism) is one among such phenomena, with highly visible postmodern signature of the 1990s and after.

3. **The emergence of European Union and a new rights regime;**

- Today, no longer a marvelous constitutional novelty, the European Union has entered the final stages of its internal fine-tuning and embarked on the course of expansion. Ushering historically new forms of citizenship,

however, it has troubled not only the meaning of national sovereignty, but also the *longue durée* "self-other" representations of the continent's "West" and "East", harking back not to communism and Cold War, but at least three centuries further, into the Enlightenment (Wolff 1994).

4. **The unintended consequences of redistributive politics in capitalist democracies and the rise of protected status identities for cultural groups through such policies;**

   - This, of course, is the most talked-about feature of the times in question: the definitive end of the classic welfare state and triumph of capitalist neo-liberalism; consequently, the shift of left-wing political focus from "redistribution" (toward economically deprived classes) to "recognition" of symbolically vulnerable minorities and their specific grievances -- the very quintessence of identity politics as such; and, finally,

5. **Changing models of capitalist and sociocultural integration in Western liberal democracies.**

   - This we may see as a cumulative consequence of all four preceding points (or, rather, points 1 and 4 for us in North America).

If nothing else, these statements are surely "as large as it gets" in social sciences (not even Spengler or Parsons would get any larger). But, they are still firmly associated with the ticklish feathers of identity -- as demonstrated already in our general tendency to use terms such as "sensitivity" in these and similar contexts. The *discourse about identity*, however, has decidedly moved away from Goffman's micro-universe as far as possible, to a variety of wider brushstroke articulations, such as "struggles for recognition" (Charles Taylor, Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, Tzvetan Todorov), "identity/difference movements" (Iris Young, William Connolly), "movements for cultural rights and multicultural citizenship" (Will Kymlicka) -- Benhabib's preferred partners in debate. For her, they all "signal a new political imaginary that propels cultural identity issues in the broadest sense to the forefront of political discourse" (2002: viii).

It should also be noted that such preference leads the discussion away from standard topics espoused in post-colonial theory, such as *representation.* In Benhabib's case this partly arises from her greater interest in political and legal, than in strictly cultural themes, and partly as a consequence of her German, not French, intellectual formation, her ideas being recognizably, if not quite literally, Habermasian in their origin. They arrive from the same -- essentially counter-postmodern -- source that, as Žižek puts it, strives to "save ethical universalism by sacrificing its substantial content and giving universalism a proceduralist twist" (Žižek 1997: 213). In fact, what matters here the most, is practical democratic *soundness* of multiculturalism, as policy answer to identity politics: whether "we propel multiculturalism because we want to *preserve* minority cultures within the liberal-democratic state or because we want to *expand* the circle of democratic inclusion" (Benhabib 2002: ix). This theorizing, ever aware of its democratic responsibility (see note on Habermas above), is deeply aware of the pitfalls arising from waving "cultural" flags in the political arena; warning against both conservatives who argue that cultures should be preserved in order to keep groups separate, because cultural hybridity generates conflict and instability; and progressives, who claim that cultures should be preserved in order to rectify patterns of domination and symbolic injury involving the misrecognition and oppression of some cultures by others (Benhabib 2002: 4). However, it only peripherally overlaps with the scope of my discussion, to which this macro-political dimension of identity is only an inflated shadow on the wall. In order to criticize both of these prophylactic views of cultures ("conservatives" vs. "progressives"), we may follow Benhabib and insist on their democratic deficiency; or we may recall that the problem of cultural essentialism is not merely political but, much before that, epistemological, which leads us to our second point and, in turn, to the methodological problem of reflexivity.

There is, of course, a discernible political shadow in reflexivity as well. In the sense in which it is commonly used in the social sciences today, the term "reflexivity" gained its currency out of political considerations, rather than

anything else, but in a roundabout way, as a recognition of political consequence (not just mere existence) of the split between "Self" and "Other". Thus the philosophical implications of the subject-object relation are exposed in the light of subject's and object's relative differences in power. Since, as Foucault taught us, there is no politically neutral knowledge, it becomes impossible to ignore the distinctive relative positions of the powerful Self versus powerless Other -- or the other way round, depending on one's own self-perception in the relation. That the representations of "otherness" were erected and fueled by stereotypes, is what was known "of yore"; what came later, was the acknowledgment that stereotyping had a purpose in externalization of Other, that is, in making sure that the Other *stays* Other. To bring this into focus methodically, however, means to question the Self as well, but again in its political capacity. As Marilyn Strathern puts it, "[t]he term "reflexivity" (...) makes a problem out of what was once unproblematic: the figure of the fieldworker" (quoted in Kulick and Willson, 1995: 2). The final impact occurred, according to Anthony Giddens, in the postmodern turn from "found-ationalism in epistemology" to "a much more reflexively organized intellectual culture" of our days (Giddens, 1996: 121). In the particular case of anthropology[16], as a discipline that illustrates the problem in the starkest light, this should come at no surprise: in its very essence, anthropology is (or, rather, was) supposed to teach "us", *the modern ones* about "them", *the non-modern ones*. Political use of this knowledge varied in time, of course, as has the ideological bias, but its acquisition has invariably been a one-way process: anthropologist travelled to faraway places, carried out the necessary field-work, then returned home and summed it up in a book, largely to be read only by other fellow-specialists (and, perhaps, perused by some imperial officer who had approved funding for the

[16]In this and the following few paragraphs I rely on anthropological, rather than sociological experiences. This is ostensibly questionable, but since the difference between 'subject' and 'object' is sharper in anthropology (actually in what we traditionally understand as anthropology) than in other social sciences, and since the problem became apparent much earlier -- at least since it became obviously problematic to define the 'objects' as 'primitive savages' -- the issue of reflexivity is only exposed in more intense light and is thus easier to explain.

expedition). The anthropologist's new friends in the Borneo or Amazon rainforest, however, generally didn't care about what he had to say about them to his old friends, back in Paris, London or Chicago. All that will, however, get wholly different in today's multi-directional cultural traffic, as "they" are now likely not only to just "read the book", but to "use it in local or even global political battles" (Giddens, 1996: 122). Still, that is not all: what happens before all that, is that "they" will contest "our" perceptions of themselves and replace them with their own ones. (This is how the mechanism of the "political battles" actually works.)

In sum, there are two focal points that shed light on the question *how* did "what was once unproblematic" turn into a "problem". Two assumptions that are questioned seem particularly important to me: first, the already mentioned clean-cut *distinctness* between the subject and the object. This very separateness is seemingly a condition that has to be met if we are to define certain endeavour as "science" at all. Speaking of anthropology, even if there is no apparent cultural barrier between concrete persons in this relationship -- for instance, when a Serbian anthropologist wishes to examine a certain aspect of Serbian folklore, she may only need to travel 20 kilometres from her university office -- the essential modern/non-modern dichotomy is still in place, in this case between modern research theory/practice/method and non-modern subject matter, or phenomenon to be researched. The second assumption is that the subject matter in question is traditionally cultural, never *political*. The distant exotic places described in the classical anthropology were invariably seen as closed-circuit little systems, where there was no room for "sophisticated conceptions of power, ideology, or cultural domination" (Giddens 1996: 123); the mind of the Other is seen as pretty much static and entirely consumed with mythical cosmologies, complicated rituals, traditional medicines and so forth.

In the postmodern turn, politics comes to the very front and decisively influences the process of reconfiguring the Self in line with reflexivity's demands. While P.C. Salzman complains that "[p]ostmodernism has turned its back on discovery and focused its attention on moralizing and political commitment"

(Salzman, 2002: 811), Don Kulick redefines the fieldwork itself as "a politically situated discursive arrangement" (1995: 16); for him the very "notion of self [is] inherently incomplete and partial" (1995: 17). Apparently, the question of sufficient critical self-awareness "within" the researcher's person, cannot be swept away by simply declaring the "reflexive-postmodern" version of *mea culpa.*

"Intimatizing" the Political: Stereotyping as the Play of the Languid Subject

With Goffman, and in his time, group identities are still limited mostly to "occupational" or surrounding rubrics and allowed to feel relatively cozy inside their sturdy yet innocuous stereotypical cubicles -- thin-striped suit for a "mobster"; tweed jacket and a pipe for an "intellectual"; thick German accent for a "psychiatrist" and so on, is pretty much everything we find here, not necessarily in Goffman's *text* but in his *world,* in terms of representation (or self-re-presentation)[17]. These are constituent parts of the reality behind that same *noir* universe that Žižek is so fond of: the world of "coy," manipulative women with long cigarette holders, pitted against "tough," disillusioned and, of course, heavily cynical men; that same geyser of phantasmic imagery that we all -- in a certain sense -- "come from." It goes without saying, however, that it all looked quite a bit different to those who actually lived in the "real" reality: Charles Lemert (2003) recalls, in passing, his own youth in the 1950s as "a perfectly silly white boy of the suburbs" who lived in the atmosphere of "Red Scare", where some people "were suffering terribly because they had once been known to have associated with someone with an accent, who might have been a communist"; the *accent,* according to Lemert, being equal to *European* and that being equal to *dangerous.*

[17] To be sure, much of this "safe," *politically void* stereotyping not only survives to our own time, but is additionally reinforced with the man-in-the-street's understanding of issues such as multiculturalism and diversity. One outstanding example is probably found in the new popular subculture of "celebrity chefs".

Still, we seem to have no other choice but to suppose that both caricatures -- say, an accented communist "mole", standing by his Hollywood swimming pool, martini in his hand, and gazing into the night sky; and a smoking *femme fatale*, one arm akimbo on a wet sidewalk, a "cool" sax tune in the background -- are, as it were, of equal "cognitive value". Since being entirely the subject's business (within the subject-object relation), a representation cannot be criticized from the standpoint of its incongruence/dissimilarity with the "real" object. Otherwise, we would not be able to understand anything from abstract paintings to animated cartoons in which animal-like creatures act like humans. Indeed, most aspects of most cultures, past and present, would remain beyond our understanding. As a matter of fact, even a properly realistic, digitized or televized "image of a sheep is not exactly like a 'real' sheep" (Hall 1997: 19) and in order to translate it in our mind into a real sheep, we need "a conceptual map which correlates the sheep in the field with the concept of 'sheep' and a language system which in visual language, bears some resemblance to the real thing or 'looks like it' in some way."

This basic postulate leads us toward two questions: Why are representations such a serious matter in our current world-historical situation? And, why is our sense of moral integrity so easily irritated by them? I will address these questions as much as I can in the subsequent chapters. Once again I am going back to Goffman, as a pre-political zero-point, and turning to this stunning remark he made, so to speak, in passing:

> Stigma management is an offshoot of something basic in the society, the stereotyping or "profiling" of our normative expectations regarding conduct and character; stereotyping is classically reserved for customers, orientals, and motorists, that is, persons who fall into very broad categories and who may be *passing strangers to us*. [1963: 51, emphasis added]

Of course, our post-colonial/post-Orientalist sensitivity will instantly spot "orientals" as "incorrect" member of this particular broad category (although Goffman was cunning enough to hide them in the middle of the list, thus

deemphasizing their presence). But let us bracket this problem, for now, and start by simply take "customers, orientals and motorists" as categorized items in the broad class of strangers who are passing through our lives in a swoop. We have no time to real-ize them, to recognize their concreteness and individual uniqueness. In other words, it is their destiny to remain mere images. Inasmuch as the world around us is a place packed with multitude of passing strangers, stereotyping turns out to be something we simply can't avoid if we want to bring some order into it. Goffman here curiously portends the more famous Lévi-Strauss's proto-Orientalist metaphor about cultures as "passing trains," moving each on its own track at its own speed in its own direction:

> Trains rolling alongside ours are permanently present for us; through the windows of our compartments we can observe at our leisure the various kinds of car, the faces and gestures of passengers. But if, on an oblique or parallel track, a train passes in the other direction, we perceive only a vague, fleeting, barely identifiable image, usually just a momentary blur in our visual field, supplying no information about the event itself and merely irritating us because it interrupts our placid contemplation of the landscape which serves as the backdrop to our daydreaming. [1985: 10]

This sort of melancholy, *tristesse* or *ennui,* witness to the already extant infirmity of the subject. If, as Ziauddin Sardar puts it, "the real power of the West is not located in its economic muscle and technological might [but] in its *power to define"* (1999: 44) here, we already have to deal with a seriously weakened power of the sort. This, of course, is the standard Foucauldian matrix: if I grant someone else the power to define me, he may just as well define me "out of existence" (Sardar); somewhat like the man in the story inadvertently did to his son. To be defined, I must be shed light on, and that is, we shall remember, within the powers of director -- a position left out of Goffman's schema. Where an insight like this falls short, however, is in its assumption that the *will to power/knowledge* of the Western subject, that is his will to exert this "power to define," will never run dry; that he will never become bored with this power and simply relegate it to the fickle forces of the market and intellectual fashions, which, in turn, will

define someone like Sardar either "out" or back "into" existence -- along with his tenure at Western factories of knowledge and/or his access to the Western publishing industry -- without some conceivable premeditated design.

2. Imagining: the Distant Gaze

> ... and if you gaze for long into the abyss,
> the abyss gazes also into you.
> Nietzsche

He'd been rehearsing for me some of the more gruesome stories that have crossed his desk ..., says Lawrence Weschler, of the *New Yorker* magazine, introducing us to Antonio Cassese, an Italian judge serving with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia, at The Hague:

> ... maybe not the most gruesome but just the sort of thing he has to contend with every day and which perhaps accounts for the sense of urgency he brings to his mission. The story, for instance, of a soccer player. As Cassese recounted, "Famous guy, a Muslim. When he was captured they said, 'Aren't you So-and-So?' He admitted he was. So they broke both his legs, handcuffed him to a radiator, and forced him to watch as they repeatedly raped his wife and two daughters and then slit their throats. After that he begged to be killed himself but his tormentors must have realized that the cruelest thing they could possibly do to him now would simply be to set him free, which they did. Somehow, this man was able to make his way to some U.N. investigators, and told them about his ordeal -- a few days after which, he committed suicide."
>
> [...]
>
> And at one point I asked Judge Cassese how, regularly obliged to gaze into such an appalling abyss, he had kept from going mad himself. His face brightened. "Ah," he said with a smile. "You see, as often as possible I make my way over

> to the Mauristhuis museum, in the center of the town, so as to spend a little time with Vermeers." (Weschler 2004: 13-14[18])

We further learn what exactly Justice Cassese sees in Vermeer's paintings. Three things: "a centeredness, a peacefulness, a serenity". The rest of the article is not too difficult to guess. Weschler clutches on Cassese's idea, runs to The Hague's Mauristhuis museum, and then acquaints us with his thoughts and musings, readily flaunting quotations from a few fine coffee-table books on Vermeer.

What do we make of this? One approach is readily available: in all too easy a volley -- using well worked-out, elaborate tools from the post-colonial and cultural-studies arsenal -- we could simply scold both Weschler and Cassese as "Orientalists", or something even worse than that, following a pattern that has indeed been tried out many times over (Todorova 1997, Goldsworthy 1998, 2002) in a line of scholarship developed in the 1990s as a Balkanist derivative of Orientalism.

Representation of Estranged Violence: Orientalism's New Playground

For reasons more or less apparent (like absence of colonial past, to name but the most obvious of all), an attempt to discuss the notions such as *Orientalism* (or, say, *postcolonialism)* in context of Eastern Europe and the Balkans would result in difficulties of both historical and conceptual nature. That is not to say that translation of these terms is altogether impossible; only that certain clarifications and modifications are required beforehand. In Edward Said's reinterpretation Orientalism stops being a scientific specialization -- a scientific study of languages and cultures of the Orient -- and becomes a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient -- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views

[18]In the listing of sources Weschler notes that the piece published in this 2004 collection "expands on *Inventing Peace*, a reflection piece in the November 20, 1995, issue of *The New Yorker*" (2004: 409) which he wrote when the war had barely ended. A year later he reused the (Justice Cassese's) idea of juxtaposing the international prosecution of ex-Yugoslav war crimes and Vermeer's paintings in a BBC documentary titled *Judging Vermeer*. I draw exclusively on the book.

about it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short Orientalism [can be discussed and analyzed] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over Orient" (1978: 3).

The vision has, in the meantime, spread around like a universal prophecy, as a sort of critical blueprint for intellectual reconfiguration of the world, at first performed as a sort of cultural autopsy on dead European empires. To be sure, in east/central Europe we had something like this before, with reference to "reclaimed" Habsburg legacy in mid- to late 1980s, which became a sort of half intellectual fashion and half political project aimed at emancipation of Russian rule imposed on most of these countries by Cold War. These debates, however, were not at all informed by "identity politics" in the sense the notion would acquire in the subsequent decade; extremely "Eurocentric" in nature they had nothing to do with the propositions of Asad, Said, Spivak or Hall, whose works would become more widely read and discussed in the later 1990s. The British-Habsburg-Russian post-imperial parallel would come to the front stage firstly as methodological problem, since the two continental empires did not have colonies, distant overseas territories, but have rather ruled over adjacent populations, fairly similar in terms of race, culture and often religion too. But, even though focused on such an *Other* that, one might say, appears to be "closer" than the *Other* accounted for through the classic "Orientalist" approach, these theories have nevertheless provoked responses similar to those of post-colonialists. For example, analyzing the Winston Churchill's celebrated "Iron Curtain" metaphor, the American historian Larry Wolff traces it back to eighteenth century, when the West "invented" the East:

> It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. [...] It [then] appropriated to itself the new notion of "civilization," [which] discovered as its complement, within the same continent, the shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. [...] It has flourished as an idea of extraordinary potency since the eighteenth century, neatly dovetailing in our own times with the rhetoric and

> realities of the Cold War, but also certain to outlive the collapse of Communism, surviving in the public culture and its mental maps. [Wolff 1994: 4]

Basically, Wolff detects the process in which, "as the centers of culture and finance had shifted from the treasures and treasuries of Rome, Florence and Venice to the now more dynamically important cities of Paris, London and Amsterdam," (1994: 5) the classical image of the *civilized South* versus *barbarian North* -- that had persisted, more or less undisturbed, from Greek and Roman antiquity throughout Middle Ages and the Italian Renaissance -- turned by 90 degrees, clockwise, and the new "mental map" of civilized West versus barbarian East was put together in the Europeans' heads instead.

Shortly after Wolff, the Bulgarian-born scholar, Maria Todorova, published her influential book *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). More so than Wolff, Todorova is skeptical about applicability of the Said's method in this area: "Balkanism," she says, "is not merely a sub-species of Orientalism", partly because South-East Europe (or the Balkans) has been considered geopolitically distinct from the middle east. In this respect,

> The Balkans' predominantly Christian character, moreover, fed for a long time the crusading potential of Christianity against Islam. Despite many attempts to depict its (Orthodox) Christianity as simply a subspecies of oriental despotism and thus as inherently non-European or non-Western, still the boundary between Islam and Christianity in general continued to be perceived as the principal one. Finally, the construction of an idiosyncratic Balkan self-identity, or rather of several Balkan self-identities, constitutes a significant distinction: they were invariably erected against an "oriental" other. [1997: 19][19]

[19]Todorova was annoyed that the "Balkanist" generalizations, becoming immensely popular during the wars in former Yugoslavia; generalizing these wars as "Balkan wars" (with convenient historical reference to the original Balkan wars in 1912-13) was in itself insulting for the entirely innocent Balkan nations such as Albania, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania. But also by resurrection by cultural "Balkanism" (a mental map fully corresponding with Orientalism) as the journalists routinely linked Count Dracula with the savagery of the ethnic warfare, reinventing cultural myths of "age-old hatreds."

In short: the issues at stake -- roughly described as continuous conflict between "Orientalist" negation and nationalist (re)apprehension of identity -- are far from being absent; rather, one can see them as actually *hyperpresent* and *hypercomplicated*. This is, however, only one of the many sides of the topic: it should be noted that Todorova writes in the early 1990s at the opening (and bloodiest) stages of the Bosnian war, when the Western observers were still largely confused with was going on. As usual in such circumstances, rather than sharpening their gaze and looking *into* the event itself, the observers turned either to antiquated nineteenth-century clichés about "age-old hatreds" ever reigning among these "bits and refuse of nations", or to past events such as original Balkan wars (1912-13), where many famed reporters of the day (including Leon Trotsky [1980] and the American John Reed, future witness of the Russian revolution) also related stories of incomprehensible savagery of all warring parties.

The perpetual metaphorical linking of Count Dracula and bloody realities of ethnic warfare, as demented as it is, soon became irritating for many, both inside and outside of the region -- and it was only the question of when someone would recall the Said's analytic apparatus, the set of categories such as (probably the most useful one in this particular case) "textual attitude", that is, persistent clinging to old texts and applying literally what one reads onto reality, without bothering to actually experience that reality. A little later, paradoxically, when authorized specialists faced competition from ordinary reporters, who travelled and spent time at length at the Bosnian frontlines (particularly in its capital Sarajevo) the "Balkanist" bias gradually faded: when confronted with reality, one learns that there generally is no such thing as *grassroots warfare* (as the theory of "hateful savages" would have it); that the violence was organized, not self-propelled; that the whole event was wholly political, not cultural; and so on.[20]

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[20]Historian Ivo Banac expressed similar view at this early moment: "The so-called Yugoslav specialists, with only a few exceptions, have for a long time excelled in benighting sundry manuscripts with the rosy picture of Titoist "self-management" and nationality relations. When the prism of history turned to contention and then war, the journalists and itinerant pundits

Limitations of Balkanism

At this point, I must depart from Todorova, while also watching carefully not to slip into lame political polemic with known outcome, for which this is neither time nor place. Still, some points need to be stated, for mere clarity. First, the subsequent development of events entirely disproved Todorova's proposition of "crusading potential" (which, by the way, unwittingly fell in line with the consistently Orientalist presupposition of the radical Serb nationalists, who had expected, quite seriously, that throwing a few million Muslims out of "European soil" would be met with the Western applause). Conversely, of course, the major part of Western public acted out not of this ill-imagined Christian solidarity, but out of its far more important civil religion of universal human rights. Correspondingly, "the boundary between Islam and Christianity in general" not "continued," as Todorova would have it, but *discontinued* to be "perceived as the principal one." Indeed, only adherents of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis seemed willing to consider this Christianity/Islam dichotomy with any rate of seriousness. Huntington himself says, commenting on Bosnian war-time linking to the Arab world, that "the plight of the *'blue-eyed Muslims'* of the Balkans mobilized the whole Muslim world in an effort to provide military, economic and political assistance to their coreligionists." (1996: 169, emphasis added). While this figure of speech speaks volumes about Huntington, and hardly anything about Bosnians -- it may be noted with some added cynicism that, even in people of Huntington's ideological setup, the "blue-eyed" part of the metaphor somehow outweighed the "Muslim" part, leading the general perception into some sort of *twisted Orientalism*.[21]

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were quicker than the Yugoslav specialists and frequently produced better and more intelligent interpretations" (Banac 1994).

[21]It may be interesting to note that Said himself had nothing to say about this corner of the world. The 1994 edition of *Orientalism* (the one I have on my shelf) comes with a lengthy afterword he wrote mostly in order to summarize his interminable polemic with his archenemy, Bernard Lewis. The piece, according to a dated signature at its end, was written in the weeks following the notorious market place massacre in Sarajevo (February 1994), when pretty much

Todorova's next point, that Orientalism in the Balkans is also an inside thing, a part of idiosyncratic self-identity construction, rather than the modus operandi of the Western mind is farther reaching. The typical expressions of prejudice, when subjected to a nationalist ideology's attempt to codify it, to give it some sort of intellectual articulation, would indeed assume some Orientalist patterns, which another American scholar originating from the former Yugoslavia, Milica Bakić-Hayden, has termed "nested Orientalism", or process of "nesting Orientalisms" (cf. Bakić-Hayden 1995; Hayden and Bakić-Hayden 1992). In a rather farcical picture, much like a set of Russian dolls the smaller hidden inside the bigger, she observes the peculiar phenomenon, that the groups that are themselves "orientalized" nevertheless tend to "orientalize" their neighbours whom they perceive as "less European" than themselves. The phenomenon is indeed observable, in typical patterns of prejudice, when directed from Catholic Croats toward Orthodox Serbs, or from Orthodox Serbs toward Bosnian or Albanian Muslims.

One shortcoming of this observation is that it does not account for reversed situation (which one might loosely call "Occidentalist"), that is, in such patterns of the ex-Yugoslav jingoism that appear directed from dominant Orthodox Serbs toward Catholic Croats, or even more often, Slovenes (another, smaller Catholic group, but industrially most advanced nation in the ex-Yugoslavia). The term "Occidentalism" may sound paradoxical (see, for example, Buruma and Margalit 2004), but the basic rules of the game are quite easy to explain: one only needs to turn the typical slurs (as well as epithets of self-adulation) upside-down into their "negative values". For instance, if one presents Said's original concept as a set of "pervasive patterns of representation of cultures and societies that privilege a self-confidently 'progressive,' 'modern' and 'rational' Europe over the putatively 'stagnant,' 'backward,' 'traditional' and 'mystical' societies of the Orient" (Bakić-

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anyone had something to say about Bosnia. Not Said, though--which is, perhaps, the most telling symptom of problematic compatibility of his theory and this particular problem.

Hayden and Hayden 1992: 1) -- then, by turning these percepts upside-down, one might also describe oneself as "emotionally deep," "cordial," "open," "friendly" and "sincere," and the *Occidentalized other* as "hypocritical," "emotionally warped," "soulless," "industrious but talentless" and of course, "sexually impotent" (this in contrast to typically oriental oversexed lasciviousness). However, even with this "correction," these bi-directional "games of representation", are hardly something more than an entertaining witticism of a meagre theoretical value; and not very yielding for the task of understanding the peculiarities of Balkan nationalism.

A much more serious difficulty of this theory, however, is that it strips the Said's concept of its inherited Foucauldian rigour. Both "nationalism" (as an old word) and "Orientalism" (as a new one) are, as sociologists would say, theoretically rich concepts, attached to serious and complex macro-social facts. Jingoism, however, is not; in fact, jingoism is hardly a concept at all. The flood of this theorizing has only managed to reduce "Orientalism" to a little more than a fancy synonym for jingoism. Once such reduction is undertaken, just about anything can be labelled as "Orientalism": portraying of Germans in World War II movies, or essentializing Italians in conjunction with organized crime in America, or depiction of Prairie "red necks" in central Canada. In order to understand the necessary conditions of the mentioned theoretical rigour, and how it reflects on its usability in the Balkans and broader Eastern Europe, one first has to take apart the notion of *imperialism*, that plays crucial part in Saidian discourse, appearing inextricably attached to "Orientalism" itself. For Said, imperialism had enormous consequences, including personal, as he would not become the person he was without the imperial framework. Like other protagonists of post-coloniality, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha in theory, or Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe and many others in fiction, he became aware of this in his later youth or early middle age and it -- one may guess with a reasonable amount of certainty -- determined his work more than anything else.

For East Europeans, however, at least those old enough to remember communism in its full bloom, "imperialism" was (and still is) difficult to be taken seriously already as a word -- due to decades of its abuse as a crude Stalinist label. Still, the underlying meaning, drawn from the Lenin's well-known definition of imperialism as the "highest stage of capitalism," is still for the most part plausible view of this phenomenon, or term that came into widespread modern use in the late nineteenth century.[22] Said, as one shall recall, insists on an ostensibly absurd limitation of his analysis only on Anglo-French and later American discourse of "conquest and imperialism." Even though Said never says if he was using the word in Lenin's sense -- it appears from this limitation that what he means by imperialism only applies to the Atlantic empires that went through their full historical life-cycle as capitalist, entrepreneurial and commercial (that is, "imperialist" on Lenin's terms). Excluded are the *old* ones (like Spain and Portugal) whose "best before date" had passed before the making of the world capitalism; excluded, too, are the continental/Eastern *latecomers* that were either thwarted from territorial expansion (Germany and later Japan) or have been fatefully behind in developing capitalist economic base (Russia). Such a classification -- which is very important to note in this discussion -- not only greatly limits the sheer geographical applicability of the word "imperialism", but also the whole set of notions that generally seem possible only within the framework of "imperialism": included among these should be not only "Orientalism", but also the classic Gramscian *hegemon-subaltern* pair, which is

[22]At any rate, it does not retract very much from other contemporary or later views, which see this historical phase, mostly concentrated between 1870 and 1914 as "characterized by intense competition among the European powers for control of the world" (Marshall 1998) out of need to expand the markets, fulfill a certain "civilizing mission", or satisfy a sheer ambition -- prestige or sense of glory -- personally nurtured by individual monarchs. In this original sense, Imperialism, in general agreement of most theorists, "came to an end with World War I, which destroyed many of the monarchical regimes and devastated others" (Marshall 1998). Many of these traits are visible in today's American policies, particularly after 9/11. However, in the Balkan developments it is even more difficult to apply them mechanically.

even more essential for understanding these issues -- and which has also gotten to be strangely caricatured in the "non-colonial" area of Eastern Europe.

Probably the most apparent trait of the modern history of Eastern Europe in general, and the Balkans in particular, is the incredible density of events, packed in relatively short time: instead of saying "people without history" what would hammer home is rather "people with too much history". For instance, looking into the wide area from Baltic sea in the north to Aegean in the south, between Germany and Italy in the west and Russia in the east -- in the eight decades between 1914 and 1994, that could have been spanned by many an individual's life, there have been five global political orders, each dramatically different from the preceding one, along with some additional local regime or policy changes, scarcely less dramatic in magnitude. I am not going to dwell at length at any one of these, but let me just count them all, as cursorily and quickly as possible. The *first* one was established at the Congress of Berlin (1878) and lasted until the end of the World War I; it was the only one with *classical imperial* traits, in which the Great Powers "took care" of small and "backward" "peoples without history" in an appropriately imperialist fashion. The *second* ensued after the breakup of continental empires in 1918 (while the Atlantic ones, Britain and France, continued until about 1960 when most of Africa became independent); ideologically it was based on US President Woodrow Wilson's invention of national "self-determination" and its chief foreign-policy mission was to provide a "sanitary cordon" against the spillover of Russian revolution into Western Europe; the *third* one, starting in early to mid-1930s was marked with hegemony of Nazi Germany (I put it before the start of World War II, as most of these nations lapsed into some sort of home-grown fascist dictatorships even before direct German occupation); the *fourth* order was based on the Cold War dominance of the USSR; and the *fifth* one is marked with the struggle of most of these countries to bridge the centuries' old East/West divide, as defined here by

Larry Wolff, and get accepted to the West, now gradually stabilizing as the rising hegemony of the expanding European Union.

As I have said, only the first (oldest) order in the sequence, was tantamount to a *full-fledged imperialism.* Quite far from any deliberate cynicism, this is to say that the hegemon-subaltern pair was clean cut and "meta-historically fixed" as it appears in the First-Third world relation. In this relation -- as opposed to its East European adequate -- the members of the pair are always easily recognizable: the hegemon is "white," "western," "European," whereas the subaltern is invariably "non-"... all that, plus, more often than not, non-Christian, too. To be sure, these boundaries can sometimes get blurred, like in that peculiar consequence of the British imperialism, the emergence of Indian (Hindu) elites that have taken up the hegemonic role in societies like Uganda or Fiji. There is also a possibility of a radical change of roles, but this is only a political *trompe l'oeil,* a temporary crisis, without far reaching cultural consequences.

A View from Afar: on Three Images

There is a memorable scene in *Paris, Texas* (1984) in which Wim Wenders affirms himself as the unsurpassed master of "empty" time/space passage in the European cinema. With camera affixed to the back seat of a car, and silence checkered only by the moronic rhythm of squeaky windshield wipers, we gaze straight into the emptiness, over the shoulders of two estranged lovers, as the rain pours on the endless road ahead.

In the late summer of 2000, while driving home from work in the outskirts of Edmonton, I got caught by a sudden storm. There was a camera on the seat beside me (I just got back from vacation and there were a few unused shots of film in it) and, just as the first drops of rain hit the windshield I stopped the car, grabbed the camera and took this snapshot (Figure 1). Later, I e-mailed the photo to my friends from back home (all of them familiar with the Wenders' film), with caption: "Paris, Canada". I should now like to try to put this in a broader perspective.

Figure 1: Between Clareview and Ft. Saskatchewan, looking westward

Foucault opens his *Order of Things* with the well-known discussion of Velàzquez' *Maids of Honour (Las Meninas,* 1656), a highly unusual piece of work that, "as all the critics agree, raises certain questions about the nature of *representation"* (Hall 1997: 56, italics in the original[23]), which in Foucault's use becomes a lever to raise the problem of the *subject* in its full width. The scene, according to most widely accepted interpretation (shared also by Foucault and Hall), represents Velàzquez himself, while working on a large, full-length portrait of the royal couple. We can only see the back of his huge easel, but the King and Queen are reflected in the mirror on the back wall. To Velàzquez' left, in the exact centre of the composition, "stands what tradition recognizes as the little princess, the Infanta Margarita, who has come to watch the proceedings", accompanied by an "entourage of duennas, maids of Honour, courtiers and dwarfs and her dog" (Hall 1997: 58). However, while being in the centre of the picture, the princess is not its "subject": it is, rather, the royal couple, who are the object of the princess's,

[23]Here I draw on Hall's textbook interpretation, rather than Foucault's original.

most of her attendants' and the artist's gaze. In short, "we are looking at a picture in which the painter is in turn looking out at as" (Foucault's words cited by Hall). Velàzquez is looking at his models and they are sitting in the place from which we are looking at the picture. Therefore, our own gaze is identical to that of the King and Queen of Spain.

Figure 2: Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velàzquez, *Las Meninas* (1656). The Prado museum, Madrid, Spain

In that case, the primary question posed by this complicated game is: Who or what is *the subject* of this painting? Leaving aside the somewhat ambiguous meaning of the word in English (in a context like this, covering both the "author", initiator of something and, more commonly, that something's "theme"), one thing is certain: for Foucault the subject is not the painter. As a man who -- despite what he had thought of himself -- came out of the structuralist mould, Foucault had rejected the notion of the "Author" (Foucault 1984: 101) and consequently here we see no appreciation for the genius of the artist. Structuralism is of course completely impervious to evaluation as part of criticism -- hostile to the notion of a "work of art" itself -- and, as a matter of fact, according to not just Foucault's, but any hardcore structuralist analysis, Velàzquez is in no way "better" than I am, with my camera, caught in a summer storm on some back road between Clareview and Fort Saskatchewan. Hence, no reference is made of Velàzquez' curious and

daring formal experiment that must have been quite subversive for the time. No attention is paid, in other words, to the artist's *own* imaginative representation of these characters.

Rather, it is the spectator, us, looking at the picture, who is the privileged subject -- and, it should be noted, at this point we are moving away from classic structuralism and approaching Foucault's own notion of discourse. The "discourse of painting in the picture" (Hall 1997: 59) -- having that painting is also a form of discourse -- works through the "complex interplay between *presence* and *absence*" since representation works as much through what is not shown. To clarify further, it should be stressed that this "discourse of painting" is not painting as action, or the gerund of the verb: touching and staining the canvas with a brush dipped in paint. Rather, it is *"the* painting", as noun: overall composition of the scene; that is, *representation* of the scene on a two-dimensional rectangular piece of stained cloth called "painting".

This particular painting serves Foucault's purpose through a sort of inadvertent -- avantgardist before the term, so to speak -- ambiguity of the "subject", the central figure of the composition. At first sight, this central figure seems to be the little princess. We have an eye contact with her and with several other figures, but she is the one who occupies the central and frontal part of the scene/discourse. Right above her head, however, there is a mirror reflecting the royal couple, the painting's "real" subject; equal, in spatial position to the spectator, us, which for Hall is why it is real and not illusory[24] in its discursive position. Thus the discourse of the picture forces us to oscillate between the two subjects without ever finally deciding which one to identify with. The spectator is doing two kinds of looking: looking at the scene from the position outside, in

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[24]It might be interesting to compare this to what grammarians call "ergative voice": the "third" voice, applicable to certain verbs, beside active and passive. While active voice provides full account of both subject and object of an action ("Jane froze some peas from the garden"), and the passive enables us to "hide" or disregard the subject ("The peas from the garden were frozen"), the ergative voice gives us the illusion of an object performing an action on itself ("The peas from the garden froze really well"). (From HarperCollins Cobuild Dictionary)

front of, the picture and looking out of the scene, by identifying with the looking being done by the figures in the painting (Hall 1997: 60).

Furthermore, the spectator is also "subjected" to the discourse of painting: in Foucauldian perspective, it is discourse, not the subjects, "who speaks the meaning," which in turn "produces knowledge." Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of episteme, the "discursive formation", the "regime of truth," of a particular period and culture. In other words, however absurd it might sound at first, we seem to "make sense" of the picture by throwing ourselves into it and joining its subjects. On the one hand, we are produced as subjects by allowing the "discourse of painting" to subjugate us to itself: in Hall's own little verbal pirouette, "[t]he spectator, we might say, is painted into position in front of the picture" (1997: 60). On the other hand, with regards to our spatial position, equalling that of the King and Queen, we are flattered with the great deal of importance: the same "discourse of painting" accords us the position of the absolute sovereign at which we are not only *looked at*, but also clearly *looked up to*, by as many as six out of the nine human figures in the painting.

By comparison, my Clareview snapshot is ostensibly subjectless. Like in any such "wide-angle" landscape, the position of the subject is not vacant, however, but occupied by the emptiness itself. This emptiness is how we imagine "Nature" -- in supposed contrast to ancient or illiterate peoples to whom Nature is a busy place crowded with a complex system of deities, each one with its own task necessary for smooth operation of the Nature's temporal cycles. Because of that, I must allow that some might interpret this emptiness as God; others, perhaps, as a placeholder for the absent God[25]. Beyond any such ideological inscriptions, that one may ascribe to it, the mystique of the picture probably rests on its sheer tranquility; placidity of the moment, stopped in the flow of time, right

[25]One wonders if it is only natural that people who populate "infinite" landscapes such as this tend to be "literally" religious, in a way long forgotten in segmented, precisely delimited and parceled out urban spaces of "civilization".

before the onset of a meteorological "drama". In that sense it is fully correspondent with Justice Cassese's longing for "a centeredness, a peacefulness, a serenity".

Yet the representational foundation of this splendour; that something which "guarantees" to supply us with the sensation of centredness, peacefulness and serenity, is now in geometry of the composition (that is, discourse) alone; not in a face, or a group of faces, looking at us with reverence. As opposed to standard landscape the discourse of the picture is clearly not the work of the "Nature" itself: the perceived tranquility of this natural scenery is reinforced by a man-made scaffolding, the parallel lines of the road and the homothetic series of electric poles beside it. Both are leading straight into what perspective theory calls *vanishing point.* Strictly centrally located, this point is the point of "infinity"; which, as I have hinted, in the given compositional discourse, may "speak" certain religious meaning to the subject-spectator. Operating as "skeleton" or armature within the natural landscape, the road and the sequence of electric poles "centre" our gaze, not only alleviating our perception of the vanishing point but also, in a sense, "policing" our focus-keeping on it. Our gaze may shortly wander off to scan the horizon left or right but the gravitational pull of the compositional discourse will always *force it back* to the centre sooner or later. Therefore the purpose of the "scaffolding" is to strengthen the sense of "order" in the scene: while natural landscape itself may deliver sufficient amounts of peacefulness and serenity without this support, it seems quite useful for the aspect of centredness.

The privileged subject-position of the spectator remains exactly the same as in the previous example -- except for being more straightforward and less ambiguous because there is no proximal figure in the picture (subject = theme) to question the subject's (subject = spectator) status. Hall's rule about the subject being discursively "painted into position in front of the picture" applies fully even without any actual painting being involved. There is, however, one small but crucial difference: in the case of the photograph the subject is further isolated and distanced by the windshield, dashboard and the steering wheel of the car. Hence, the essential contrast between the two examples is found in the intimacy, a sense

of coziness, that the subject seems to achieve with the human figures in the Velàzquez' painting, versus cool and awesome distance -- a mathematically supported sense of spatial infinity -- in my photograph. In the latter case the provision of coziness is delegated to the body of the automobile. The subject's (subject = spectator) sense of coziness, in other words, is *equal* to his or her *isolation from* the object (subject = theme), secure inaccessibility to it. Quite obviously, how could I ascribe the qualities of "peacefulness" and "serenity" to a situation in which I am about to get soaked through in the imminent summer storm on a deserted country road without any shelter in sight? This same equation of security, isolation and intimacy -- much like watching caged beasts in a zoo, or a hockey fist fight from behind a plexiglass pane -- once transferred to the wider political world, becomes the original archetype of the "representational voyeurism" that we tend to call "Orientalism" after Edward Said.

Vermeer as the Shield Against the "Real": Focus on Žižek

Whenever there is some spare time in his working day, we are told, Justice Antonio Cassese takes off to the museum for his preventive treatment against insanity. The Mauristhuis's Vermeer collection is allegedly somewhat smaller than that in the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam, but better: here one finds some of the master's best known pieces, including the celebrated *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.

This is the face that warrants Cassese's strategy of the preservation of his sanity: instead of banality of hiding behind the windshield of a car, we can see him exposing himself to an image of a perfectly beautiful human face, brought back from what, in human measurements, is a distant past; in order to ward off the horrors occurring almost concurrently, or very short while ago, but at a distant place. For Cassese, once again, the picture radiates "a centeredness, a peacefulness, a serenity" (Weschler 2004: 14). But, for Weschler, this is only because

> it is first and foremost a painting about intersubjectivity: about the autonomy, the independent agency, dignity and self-sufficiency of the Other, in whose eyes we

> in turn are likewise autonomous, self-sufficient, suffuse with individual dignity and potential agency. And here is where we come full circle: because if Vermeer's work can be said to be one extended invention -- or assertion -- of a certain concept of peace-filledness, this is precisely how he's doing it, by imagining or asserting the possibility of such an autonomous, inhabited sense of selfhood. [2004: 20]

Figure 3: Jan Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665). Mauristhuis museum, The Hague, Holland

Since the portrait is so obviously and radically idealized[26], the presence of a certain sexual chemistry has always baffled the critics; but to amuse ourselves with the question of whether Vermeer had been infatuated with this particular maidservant in his house, whose face he decided to commit to eternity, would be beside the point. The point is that the picture is able to *carry* the infatuation itself, three and a half centuries down the road, so it can -- to paraphrase Stuart Hall's figure again -- paint itself right onto us, the subject-spectator. By simply staring at this mesmerizing face one is so firmly

[26]For example, as Albert Blankert notes, "The line of the nose is, in fact, invisible; the bridge of the nose and the right cheek simply flow into each other, forming a single area of absolutely even colour. In no other painting by Vermeer do we see so clearly how his truthfulness to nature was coupled worth a desire to represent it in its ideal state." (The excerpts from Blankert (1978), Snow (1979) and other scholars are available on a website maintained by Mauristhuis's curators at http://essentialvermeer.20m.com. However, to simplify referencing procedures, I include their original works in the bibliography.)

"locked in" so as to be somehow prevented, according to Edward Snow (a commentator on whom Weschler relies the most), from taking a step back in order to appreciate the whole picture -- which would, we may add, imply its objectification. If so, then, in turn, the subject-spectator is at the same time thwarted from asserting himself as such, inasmuch as to "imagine or assert" oneself as subject necessarily implies that the *object* of his gaze is separated from himself and properly *objectified.* In Snow's own words,

> It is me at whom she gazes, with real, unguarded human emotions, and with an erotic intensity that demands something just as real and human in return. The relationship may only be with an image, yet it *involves all that art is supposed to keep at bay*. And although it is a moment of human interiority at the heart of the painting that gives it such resonance, it is still the private, ultimately inaccessible nature of the experience that Vermeer contemplates, enclosing it in a world positioned over there, out of reach. As a result, the world he opens is impregnated with imaginative life, and *seems miraculously close at hand.* [1979, emphasis added.]

When backed with something like this, Weschler's contention about "intersubjectivity" is essentially acceptable, although it apparently flies in the face of common sense. For, how can one establish an "intersubjective" relationship with a dead image on a 340 year old wooden panel? Snow is aware of the problem -- as we can pick from the second sentence in this quotation -- albeit his statement of the fact may seem somewhat clouded with the quasi-voyeuristic exaltation of his style. That difficulty is surmountable, of course, only as long as we can *imagine* to have such a relationship -- in my own case, not even with a particular seventeenth century painting itself, but with a digital copy of it, which I downloaded yesterday. (I only happen to know the original's age, but that bears no consequence for an impressions such as that of Snow.)

Snow's "Yoda-style" syntactic inversion is neither without purpose, nor without its own discursive consequences. The phrase "It is me at whom she gazes" says neither simply "She gazes at me", nor -- the same thing with some added emphasis -- "It is she who gazes at me, and not me who gazes at her." Rather, "It

is me at whom she gazes" implies "... and not at someone else." At this point we can even throw in a joke by inflating Snow's exaltation to a comical burst: suppose he had brought with him to the museum a couple of friends and that all three men were looking at the picture at the same time; then we can imagine each one of them saying, or at least thinking: "It is me at whom she gazes, while ignoring you two losers!" Here, of course, is the very essence of intersubjectivity: as Weschler broached above, both sides are engaged individually "by imagining an autonomous, inhabited sense of selfhood." To take another example, when I watch a movie or a play in a packed theatre, they always "speak" to *me*, and to a series of other *me's* in the crowd, never to the crowd as a whole[27].

Still, the theoretical implications springing from the question of who gazes at whom (she at me or me at her), are much more important in our context. This dilemma takes us straight to the two competing notions of "gaze" that we usually operate with: the feminist/Foucauldian and the psychoanalytic/Lacanian. The preceding discussion reveals that I am biased toward the latter position, but I should nevertheless like to sketch them both out.

Snow's vulnerability to feminist criticism is fairly obvious: we only need to imagine what would his words sound like -- the caricatural bent and loss of meaning they would sustain -- if they were uttered by a woman (or a heterosexual woman, to be precise). From the feminist viewpoint, we can never accept that it is she who gazes at him, simply because he is the only one who *actually can* gaze (which in this particular case is self-evident, given that "she" is just a dead image) while his poetic style only amplifies the subject's desiring contents. This perspective, in short, sees the gaze as exclusive property of a powerful, desiring subject who looks at disempowered, stripped-down object: the best and most commonly used example is found of course in voyeuristic male spectatorship of the female body -- in film and other visual media: both directly, in pornography,

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[27]The opposite applies to political or ceremonial speeches and the reason why speeches always sound shallow and phoney to us is precisely in that they "play at the crowd": they are, in other words, addressed to the crowd itself, not to me-in-the-crowd.

and indirectly, in sundry "artistic/expressive" uses of female nudity, or in commercial, advertising imagery and so forth. Furthermore, the *same* logic applies also to Orientalism-style critique and post-colonial theory, only the subject is now not, or not only, male but also European, hegemonic and "Western" who gazes in the *same* manner, at various "exotic" locales and populations. With reference to this way of thinking it is important to stress that the notions of subject and object are understood fully in line with Cartesian and subsequent Western metaphysics. Subject is the agency that says "I"; it is outfitted with the power and authority to act on the object at will, whereas the object only exists to be handled by the subject. Eventually, the object is utterly helpless and, in Marxian turnabout, realizes that it can only recover its subjectivity by means of political/revolutionary struggle.

The second perspective starts out not from refutation of this position, but from a broader understanding of object. In psychoanalysis objects are not just things we find around us; a certain piece of mass, say, meant to be handled by a certain amount of energy. An object *may* be that, too, just as it may be another person as object of my love and passion. More importantly, the "self" we imagine ourselves as having is identified by psychoanalysis as object. The objects are also *imaginary*[28]: we imagine the world to be made up by objects, while failing to see them as mere substitutes, which they really are, in endless proliferation of desire. The *gaze*, however, is just another object, which may be somewhat difficult to grasp, especially if we are conditioned within the feminist and post-colonial (that is, Foucauldian) frame of thought. As Žižek pointed out in a 1991 interview for the British journal *Radical Philosophy*:

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[28]While drawing mainly on Žižek (1989, 1997 and also Kay 2003) in this discussion, I must do my best to avoid getting entangled in complicated Lacanian apparatus, something that composition of this chapter cannot sustain. Suffice it to say that objects generally belong to Imaginary register, one of the three such registers; the other two being Symbolic and Real. *Gaze* is a special, "partial object"; preeminently imaginary, like others, but with privileged attachments to the Real.

> The way the Lacanian problematic of the gaze works here in England is mediated through Foucault's work on the panopticon: for the male gaze the woman is reduced to an object, etc. Whereas for Lacan it is the opposite: the gaze is the object, it is not on the side of the subject. If there is something totally alien to Lacan is the idea that the male position is that of the gaze that objectifies woman. [Quoted in Kay 2003: 71]

In the Foucauldian play the central character is the shattered subject that struggles to "bootstrap" itself in and against a hostile environment, which denies it recognition. This *process* of "building" oneself as subject is what interested Foucault above all and hence his focus on marginal identities and sexualities: those who have to fight for their subjectivity, to whom it is not granted. Hence, as well, his thought may be seen as endeavour to sort out the different modes by which individuals arrive at their subject-positions. Conversely, in psychoanalytic position the subject relies on the world of objects around it to prop itself up: "psychoanalytic objects are the co-ordinate and support of the subject" (Kay 2003: 52), the same scaffolding that I have discussed with regards to the pictures above. This is why the objects are indispensable to how "subjects perceive what they take to be 'reality' and why analysis of objects at the same time defines subjectivity" (Ibid). In Žižek's exegesis (1989: 175), Lacanian position is seen as some sort of the photographic negative of the Foucauldian one[29]: if we make an abstraction and take out all the experiential filling that has been deposited in the process of subjectivation -- all the fullness of experience present in the way individuals are living their subject-positions -- this very emptiness, "the lack of symbolic structure", is what the subject is.

In the case of Cassese and Weschler the Lacanian analysis lends itself easily to the situation. It would by all means be possible for us to indulge in an invidious supposition that both men are actually "presenting the self" to one another, in Goffmanian sense, parading their guileless essences/subjectivities in

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[29]Here we are reminded of "binary opposition", a term from old structuralist lingo, even coming with some Lévi-Straussian aroma: "full" versus "empty", or rather "filling" versus "emptying", moving from inside out versus from outside in.

need of protection from distant horrors which they seek in Vermeer. One can almost imagine them in costumes of the "curious" Jonathan Harker (Weschler) and the "knowledgeable" Abraham van Helsing (Cassese), characters from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Set into motion by the Count's wish to buy himself a piece of property in London and then getting there in person, the story can also be read as expression of horror of reverse colonization in which, through "the marauding, invasive Other, the British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms" (Stephen Arata, quoted in Goldsworthy 1998: 83). Vermeer's painting appears then as a cross or garlic necklace. In Lacanese this centred, peaceful and serene face gets in between us and the horror of incomprehensible, unsymbolizable "real", presenting itself as one of those objects that are referred to as "sublime".

Nonetheless, it is precisely in its capacity to produce such sarcastic twists where the deepest "ludic" nature of postmodern-informed postcolonial theorizing resides. As such it still leaves us with a sense of discomfort, for a rather obvious, yet often disregarded reason: a move like that would relegate the fate of the soccer player into a representation or "invention", and ultimately set us in a position tantamount to "Holocaust denial"[30]. Much like any kind of denial, this one too is inevitably linked to the logic of the critique of representation. On the one hand, encouraged by such critique, we assume that an account like this is false, a tall tale; in this case perhaps a little Balkan-made "Gothic" vignette for conversational

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[30]It has been argued by many that Bosnian massacres cannot be compared to the Holocaust because of the sheer difference in the number of victims (see, for example, Todorova 1999). The difference is indeed vast and I duly put the phrase in quotation marks -- even if, in response to this objection, one can still repeat what Sartre said after the Rosenbergs' execution in 1953: "What makes you a fascist is not the number of people you kill, but how you do it."

This polemic, however, is of relatively little consequence for my discussion and I intend to use it as sparingly as possible. I shall briefly return to the Holocaust problem (which I see as problem of using the Holocaust as a generic noun to describe any outburst of genocidal violence that took place after 1945) in the next chapter. The only point that needs to be made right away is this: even if the Holocaust comparison is exaggerated, the basic logic of *denial* is essentially the same, and it is denial, not the Holocaust, that I am placing the emphasis on in my argument. (Conversely, it is precisely the shift of accent from denial to Holocaust what makes this particular denial possible in the first place.)

entertainment, made up by someone blessed with both sick imagination and a good sense of market demand for such anecdotes. On the other hand, there indeed *is* -- arising from the very same inevitability -- a certain modicum of pleasure (again, in terms of "Gothic" gooseflesh), made available *by* the one who tells the story, *to* the one who listens to it, *even more so* when the story itself is true.

3. Experiencing: Struggle Against Metaphor

> Sontag even had her own "Spanish Civil War" in the 1990s, when she travelled to a besieged, ruined Sarajevo to direct by candlelight a production of *Waiting For Godot*. It was a dramatic gesture that was much larger than the drama itself: the Last Intellectual nursing the flame of modernism in a European city catapulted back into the Dark Ages. It was also a brave and inspiring -- and sincere -- thing to do, and it pointed up the ineptitude of most who toil by brain rather than hand these days when faced with embarrassing reality (one horrified New Yorker asked her son, also a writer, how he could "spend so much time in a country where people smoke so much").
> Mark Simpson (2002)

> Have you ever thought on the difference between the tears raised by a tragedy of real life and those of a touching narrative?
> Diderot: *Paradoxe sur le comédien*[31]

Speaking at the opening ceremonies of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., in the spring of 1993, President Clinton "tried to please the crowd of survivors" -- recounts Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor with the *New Republic* magazine -- by "speaking grandiloquently" about Bosnia and insisting that 'never again' would the United States allow a genocide to happen in Europe." As Clinton made his point, Wieseltier's mother, who was standing in the crowd

[31]Quoted in Munk (1994).

with him, turned and "mordantly" said: "He talks about Bosnia like he's somebody else" (Wieseltier 1996: 138).

The time for epic cursing is not past, Wieseltier goes on to say a little later in his piece (originally published in October 1993), calling for "imprecation of special magnitude, a linguistic response to wickedness that seeks to match its scale, a prayer that the punishment share the finality of the crime" because, for him,

> the Balkan disaster has provided a large number of objects for rage, not least among them, speaking coarsely, Europe [...] Fifty years ago there was no room for Jews in Europe. Now there is no room for Muslims in Europe. Those who are shocked by the indolence of the Europeans in the Balkans are forgetting history, and I do not mean the history of the fifteenth or sixteenth or seventeenth century. I mean the history of the twentieth century. This was the century in which more innocent people were slaughtered by European armies in the name of European values than were ever slaughtered by any armies in the name of any values. [Ibid.]

Are we at liberty to use "Holocaust" as a common noun -- a metaphor, that is -- in reference to events that took place after 1945 (and sometimes even before 1939) and thus imply that the real Holocaust was not a unique event in the history of the world? The question has been debated for decades. Of course, as we all know, the *"Never again"* -- the solemn covenant that made it possible for our civilization to swallow and digest the *fact* of the Holocaust and commit it to history -- has been betrayed many times, in various parts of the world, between 1945 and Bosnia. One only needs to remember Vietnam, Biafra, Bangladesh, Cambodia... examples run on. A year after the opening of the Washington museum, the horrors of Rwanda dwarfed the Bosnian massacres by a wide margin, and also reminded us that an army of crazed murderers with machetes, in a developing country, can actually "beat", in a given unit of time, the productivity of Hitler's highly bureaucratized industry of death, which we traditionally like to represent to ourselves in line with the stereotype of German industrial efficiency -- a sort of Weberian work ethics gone awry.

Rwanda, however, as many were quick to notice, commanded relatively little attention from the "white" world (even if some epic cursing was left to go around). Rwandans, many recalled, unlike both Bosnians and Hitler's victims are not white Europeans. The same rule of such "racialized allotment" applies not only to the victims, but to the perpetrators too, which strains the metaphor of Holocaust even further. In the previous chapter I have hinted how this extremely serious and complex ethical problem may be swept under the carpet through symbolic eviction of both victims and perpetrators "in package" (by way of a sort of special application of Orientalism), from the civilized circle; that is, from the scope in which Dialectic of Enlightenment applies. In other words, I have tried to demonstrate how quasi-postcolonial, *Orientalism*-inspired critique, along with home-grown identity politics, may actually be abused as a tool for demagogical deflection of responsibility on the side of perpetrators, enabling them to *"pass"* (in the proper Goffman's sense of the term) as "subscribed victims." In this sense, once acquired, the "non-western" or "uncivilized" representational status comes simultaneously with two consequences. On the one hand, the insufferable pressure of "scientifically legitimized" racist prejudice, exacted on the person's sense of identity, which is what *Orientalism* and its specific avatars speak about. On the other hand, along with this "liability" there is also "credit", in terms of recognition one receives as metahistorical (that is, perpetual, eternal, askew of historical time) victim of imperialism. Among other things, this may explain how "Never again" survived untainted -- its sublime essence fully preserved -- through several dozen Holocaust's "minor reprises" that occurred between Biafra and Rwanda. But with Bosnia the spectre came back to haunt Europe once again and the metaphor came under strain.

Holocaust as metaphor: a "theological" digression

Our concept of the Holocaust today does not seem so much threatened by the so-called "Holocaust deniers", those individuals who claim that what we think happened in Nazi death camps did not "really" happen, that our assumption (or

representation) about what was going on in there is exaggerated. What may come under question is not the "reality" of the Holocaust: thanks to Rwanda, Bosnia and a string of other places and events in our own time, we know that human species is perfectly capable of things like that, with or without Enlightenment, or the idea of progress. The problem is, rather, in its metaphoric capability.

The Holocaust is one of the central metaphors of modernity (cf., for example, Bauman 1989). What I think this means is that we need such a metaphor in order to conceptualize *Evil;* to compensate for a certain religious deficiency, which precludes our ability to construct such a concept, makes us afraid to define it and turn our eyes away in embarrassment because we think we otherwise may sound trogloditic and reactionary. Put simply, we can still *conceive* of God even if we do not *believe* in Him, because there is always room for transcendence in our minds no matter how secular we think we are -- which may surface in any form within the explosion of various quasi-religious "New Age" fashions, alternative medicines, environmental planetary consciousness and so on. Metaphoric representations of God are perfectly in-synch with both science-dominated world and consumerist fetishisms of popular culture. More precisely, the concept of God is still *metaphorically transferable,* communicable to an individual who is not only "secularized", in terms of imagery from which he draws his representations, but, perhaps, an individual who may be post-metaphysical in the traditional sense as well. This is to say that he or she may no longer be willing to buy the image of a grumpy old man with white beard hovering in the clouds, or, say, to conform to the medieval representation of the world like a three-storey construct: heaven above us, the actual world around us, and hell below us. He or she may just as well reject any "approved", philosophically or traditionally, notions of the Absolute and instead come up with his or her own imaginary of the "mystical" as, for example, in the science fiction.

The analogous conception of the *devil,* however, is much more difficult to retrieve. Consider just one example we need not go further from: Sartre's play *No*

Exit where hell comes without devil(s), only with "other people". Alternatively, the devil may come our way as a charming intellectual knave (Kołakowski 1973), with a clear satirical allure; or that "unspeakable", astonishing *paf!* effect that some events, like shootings in schools or anything involving children (Morrow 2003), have on us.

Some light may also be shed on the "unspeakable" by way of Žižek's well-known reworking of the Lacanian notion of "Real" through examples in popular culture. But the crux of the problem here is that any artistic, "imagined" rendition of pure evil -- ranging from the nineteenth century "Gothic" to the modern "horror" -- comes with much greater capacity to entertain than to enlighten; or, at best, satirize, if an allegorical link is provided to a certain kind of politically constructed reality, like in Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*. Indeed, in any attempt to conceptualize evil on intellectually more serious terms, we fare much better if we reach not for a fictional character, but real historical personality -- such as Adolf Hitler. No matter how hard we try to "understand" him, explain away historically, a certain satanic remainder is always present. This is the reason why we cannot fully historicize Hitler: there always has to remain a certain "demonologic", "gothic" component, which would be lost if we readily acknowledged that he was merely human, just like us. Even today, six decades after his end, an attempt to render him in this way, on overly human terms, like in a recent German film, *Downfall*, is bound to raise controversy.

Intellectually, politically and ideologically, there was little original in Nazism and some have recalled that Hitler's project of *Lebensraum* has basically been plagiarized and only slightly modified from the old American ideology of "Manifest Destiny" (Finkenstein 2000). Others indulged in similar sarcasms, reminding us that Hitler himself instructed the *Gauleiter* of Poland to act towards the Slavs just as the Americans had toward the "red-footed Indians" (Todorova 1999). These analogies, however, only refer to another problem that thwarts Hitler's desatanization through historicization: today, when our civilization must

acknowledge much wider array of "others" than the classic, medieval-cum-modern triplet of Jews, women and homosexuals (Mayer 1982, Delumeau 1978), we are reminded that Hitler was a character from a European story, with whom four-fifths or more of the humankind had hardly had any business at all. Only the metahistorical *wicked essence* is thus able to persist, as we require it to form a representation of Evil. For this reason, the German novelist Günter Grass has recently (on occasion of 60th VE Day anniversary) been able to say that "[c]ompared with other nations which have to live with shame acquired elsewhere -- I'm thinking of Japan, Turkey, the former European colonial powers -- we have not shaken off the burden of our past. It will remain part of our history as an ongoing challenge" (Grass 2005).

Let us now turn back, for a moment, to the ill-fated soccer player from Justice Cassese's story. He has -- we shall doubtlessly agree -- encountered Evil in the last days of his life. But we are still unable to appropriate that experience precisely because of deficit in belief. Some, among those who promote sensitivity and object to Orientalist representations, may argue that the whole story was invented so that Cassese might entertain his American guest with stereotypes about frenzied Balkan cannibals. The rest of us will probably strive to *explain away;* theorize about psychopathic consequences of elite's' nationalist tribalism as extreme form of identity politics. By doing so, however, we will shake off the burden of the metaphor: its "theological" weight. We are thus all (except Germans) doomed to fall short of the challenge that Grass speaks of. On the other hand, if we do use the Holocaust as a metaphor (as a vehicle for other experiences/tenors) we will undermine its uniqueness, and necessarily abolish its diabolical aspect and turn it into something "understandable", a standard property of human nature, something we'd better learn to live with, however disastrous that may sound.

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As the preparations in Washington for the opening ceremonies and President Clinton's speech went into final stage, I finally -- in a series of complicated and dangerous events that need not be recounted here -- made my way out of the besieged Bosnian capital Sarajevo, the city in which I was born and lived all my life thus far. I was headed westward, toward the Croatian border and the Adriatic coast, where T. and our son had taken refuge a year earlier; I had no communication of any kind with them for about eight months. Along the road, alas, the bus that was supposed to take me there first had a flat tire and then completely broke down. My accidental companion, a skinny, stringy fellow in the Croatian Army uniform -- a rather useful "signifier" to have in one's company in this part of the country -- told me he was originally from Vukovar, another metaphor-laden town up north on the Danube, that was reduced to rubble in 1991. I couldn't help noticing his hair, completely grey, although he couldn't possibly be over 30; and, of course, a slight shadow of derangement in the eyes -- a feature common enough that, I am sure, he could have seen it in my eyes too. He had been to Sarajevo to get his buddy out, he said, but the buddy got killed by a sniper bullet as they sprinted across the airport runway, the only hole in the ring of siege.

The two of us took off, hitchhiked for a while and eventually ended up travelling on foot through the arid maquis area in the near-Mediterranean southern part, called Herzegovina. As we walked along the road, now and then dusted by rich Herzegovinian kids that passed us by on their Kawasakis, caring little about the war that was about to come their way too, the sky above us was being torn in regular intervals by humongous Hercules C-130 military cargo aircraft, on their way to Sarajevo airport, hauling humanitarian aid, journalists, diplomats, assorted NGO folks and occasional other VIP guests.

One of them also carried a lady writer from New York City, with fiery dark eyes and the world-famous lock of grey hair.

"Against Interpretation": Embracing the Real

After her first stay, Susan Sontag was to come back in July of the same year, with the idea to direct local actors in staging of a play, with one of the local theatre companies. The play she had in mind was supposed to be easily authenticated into the city's current situation: Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot.* For myself, I was to return only in the following spring, for about two weeks, using my journalistic credentials obtained in the Zagreb United Nations Protection Force Headquarters, and then again, after the war, and as a Canadian resident, in the summer of 2000. Therefore, I am about to embark on something quite peculiar, if not outright bizarre: an analytic quasi-reconstruction of something I have not actually seen. I have never seen this play (production, that is); not even a documentary about its making, made by local filmmaker and produced by a local firm during the war. This documentary is, I believe, still available on tape in Sarajevo today, but I could not get hold of it here. I am relying on second order printed sources, selected from many available: Sontag's own notes (1994[32]), the in-depth interviews and notes by the Yale University based critic and journal editor, Erika Munk (1993a, 1993b, 1993c), who had accompanied Sontag during her stay in Sarajevo, as well as some auxiliary references. I shall also include reflection on some of my own writings from those years.

The personal idiosyncrasy of the story is that almost *all* of the persons mentioned by Sontag, or interviewed by Munk are my acquaintances and some close friends. Thus, in uncanny resemblance to Foucault's reading of *Las Meninas,* what I am about to do here is roughly this: *into* the "medium" of my own memories of a *certain reality* -- initially generated and then maintained through a criminal political action, but then, being thus prepared, also left to reproduce itself on its own terms -- I will attempt to mix concurrently recorded thoughts and feelings of others, some of whom I used to know very well. Occasionally, I will

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[32]The essay titled *Godot Comes to Sarajevo* first appeared in the *New York Review of Books* in 1993, then as *Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo* in the *Performing Arts Journal* (1994) and finally in the book *Where the Stress Falls* (2001).

include even my own concurrently recorded thoughts and feelings, that I often find difficult to accept as my own today.

For further clarification of the issues I will also throw in three other illustrations, not related to Sontag's endeavour.

* * *

Sontag's crusade against metaphors, their nature and the way they "work" in our culture, is rather notorious. Even those casually familiar with her past work will recall that she had turned her own experience with cancer -- the sickness she has successfully battled not once but twice[33] in her life, only to be defeated in the third attack -- into a study of metaphor, in the 1978 book *Illness as Metaphor*, arguing against imaginative thinking as such, the method itself remarkably similar to that expounded by Said and his followers: "The most truthful way of regarding illness -- and the healthiest way of being ill -- is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking" (1978: 5). A decade or so later, she would give the same treatment to the "twentieth century plague" in the book titled *AIDS and its Metaphors*. On her arrival in Sarajevo she knew well enough, therefore, to keep the metaphor at bay, and get *practical*, attempting, as the title of Erika Munk's interview with her says, "only the possible". Thus, the pronounced "Europhile" and lifetime basher of "American vulgarity" implied in American reduction of "culture" to a mere commercialized entertainment ("If I must describe what Europe means to me as an American, I would start with liberation. Liberation at what passes in America for a culture."), ultimately took up an attitude of a practical American:

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[33]This is a recollection of an interview Sontag gave to the CBC radio, some years ago, which I listened to while driving north of Edmonton (on the same road, incidentally, where the snapshot from Chapter 2 was taken).

Susan Sontag finally succumbed to cancer in December 2004.

> I went to Sarajevo in mid-July to stage a production of Waiting for Godot not so much because I'd always wanted to direct Beckett's play (although I had), as because it gave me a practical reason to return to Sarajevo and stay for a month or more. I had spent two weeks there in April, and had come to care intensely about the battered city and what it stands for; some of its citizens had become friends. But I couldn't again be just a witness: that is, meet and visit, tremble with fear, feel brave, feel depressed, have heart-breaking conversations, grow ever more indignant, lose weight. If I went back, it would be to pitch in and do something. [Sontag 1993: 87]

Quite far from the French and Central European texts she had been reading and writing about most of her life, what we see here, standing in front of us, is a real personified American practicality, eager to "pitch in and do something"; decisively intervene in the world, resolutely rejecting any thought of sentimental resignation or tragic sense of reality that is so much more typical for Europeans, especially those in the "less capitalist" east and south of the continent. A more sensitive -- perhaps too sensitive -- text analysis may also discover some unexpected motherly compassion[34] for these people she "had come to care [so] intensely about" and who "had become friends." At the same time, the city in her mind "stands for" something. What? I will be making guesses about that later. For now, there are essentially three discernible layers of the above mentioned reality that I want to account for: the first one, I shall call *physical;* the second, *performing;* and the third, *metaphorical.* This paragraph, the opening one to her text, allows one to cursorily illustrate all three layers at once, in a rare mutual interplay. Let us take a look. First of all, the city is physically *battered;* but there are also some people there who have become friends; whom one knows, whose physical faces one recognizes in the crowd. And, not to forget about that, who can get physically erased from this world at any given moment. The next, "performing" aspect,

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[34]In the same radio-interview Sontag said something one does not find in these notes; that she originally went to Sarajevo following her son, the journalist David Rieff, who had been gathering material for his own book on Bosnia. (From the summer of 1992 to the fall of 1994 Rieff lived for extended periods of time in Bosnia.) Still it would probably be vituperative to imply that she followed him because of motherly fears for his safety; rather, according to what she said in the interview, he played a decisive part in raising her curiosity about the place.

consists of literal *acting* on a theatrical stage, within a certain reality that supplies it with unexpected meanings; but also in the broader sense of performativity, that I tried to sketch out through an evolution of the notion from Goffman to Butler; in this case, by pretending to be able to do things that are beyond one's physical or actual power. Like in some female version of the protective Captain America, this is what "pitching in" and "doing something" is about. Finally, the third or metaphorical aspect is contained in this "what it [the city] stands for," here left hanging in the air, unnamed, undefined, assumed to be known to everybody and unnecessary to define.

Figure 4: Intimacy with the Real:[35] Canadian Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour, standing with Kosovar villagers over an unearthed mass grave, July 1999. At the time, Arbour served as the chief prosecutor at the Hague Tribunal (Photo: Karim Daher/GAMMA).

1. The Everyday Reality of War: Physical Body in Physical Space

In her already mentioned work about cancer, Sontag shows our tendency to throw the issue of the body "away" (or perhaps we should say, throws ourselves away

[35] I use the word "Real" in Lacanian sense, of sorts: the unspeakable, that which is outside of discourses, metaphors, definitions or any other features of the language. Instead, it is attempted at through bodily contact. Arbour's motherly pose is forceful, intensified with the composition of the picture as a whole, reminiscent of the Renaissance representations of bereavement of the Christ. Also notable is that the principle of *reflexivity* has come to a paradoxical full circle: if we did not know the context, we would surely think of Arbour as the one who is stricken by tragedy and consoled by empathic villagers -- not the other way round.

from our bodies) into the cultural sphere, that is into metaphor. This possibility to throw ourselves away is precisely what metaphors can "do" for us. But there is a lot more to them. So far as they exist, one can say, for instance: "Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you're gonna get." A single link between two things -- notions, objects -- will make the metaphor work. It does not matter how silly this link is; the thinner the better, actually, because the metaphor thus becomes sharper. The link only needs to be *imaginable* and sharable within a given multitude. Because of this, however, metaphors may also be quite deadly, for they can literally suck our sense of reality away and install themselves in its stead: a fascist, a terrorist, a schizoid, they are all individuals whose sense of reality has been devoured by one master-metaphor. I shall return to this problem in the concluding part of this chapter.

Conceiving of an illness as a metaphor also reckons on a common-sense assumption that the ill are naturally more aware of their bodies than the healthy. The concurrent evolution of sociological theory, however, has already been running in the opposite direction. In the first wave of postmodernism, for example, the reverse comes forth: the bodies become an obsession of the healthy. Practices and phenomena like manic exercising, dieting and anorexia nervosa, plastic surgery, rising interest of men in cosmetic products and so on (along with across-the-board fatigue of the political Left) led early postmodernists like Lasch (1977) in the United States and Lipovetsky (1983) in France to state that the society has arrived in the epoch of Narcissus, a sort of extremely self-centered person who pretty much does not care about anything outside his or her own body. More recently, similar way of thinking led Terry Eagleton to joke that "nowadays you can't publish anything in the United States if your title doesn't come with the word 'body' in it" (Eagleton 2000).

Of course, such caricature only aims at the perceived run-off-the-mill hyperproduction and ad-nauseam repetition that has plagued this line of theorizing. It says little or nothing about the real and lasting urgency of the topical focus itself. Already for the earliest feminists, like de Beauvoir (1953) and Greer (1970),

the body is the site of resistance to the dominant patriarchal ideology of the mind-body dualism and its hidden desires[36]. With Foucault it is the body that becomes the ultimate target of the societal "microphysics of power", not the soul, that "illusion of the theologians":

> A 'soul' inhabits him [the real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection, or technical intervention] and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. [Foucault 1977: 30]

From here we may perhaps go ahead and make a special application of this proposition, in order to say that the metaphor or performing imperative is also the prison of the body of sorts. And when Foucault invokes Frederick II of Prussia -- the monarch who was literally breeding his armies -- in order to talk about "docile bodies" (Foucault 1977: 135-170), we seem to be able to make a link to the gyms, weight lifting parlours and plastic surgery clinics of the late twentieth century that impressed Lasch and Lipovetsky. Ultimately we can say, following the feminist argument, that we don't *have* our bodies; that, rather, we *are* our bodies. In consequence, our bodies are not supposed to be seen any longer as mere physical vehicles for what we -- led by deeply rooted religious traditions -- tend to think we "really" are: "persons," "souls," "selves," "subjects" (or even authored concepts, such as "Ego"); rather, these concepts are actually just *metaphors* for the only instance of "me" existing in the physical world: the body.

Still, here we are dealing with a situation where body counts, more than it normally would, because of frailty and abnormal stress. In this particular context, body seems to be the last refuge where one can return after being

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[36]The theme of the body is huge in feminism and I certainly don't imagine that I can summarize its many facets here. Rather, I just pick few bits of it that fit my discussion.

"burned" in performing or metaphorical "Hyperreality". In one theoretical recapitulation,[37] "the body,

> far from being given once and for all, is endlessly subject to alteration by an array of circumstances -- both organic and inorganic -- including congenital and acquired illness, technology, *terror*, and the process of ageing. All of these and many others shape and inscribe the body, not necessarily from outside, but in ways they are often beyond the subject's conscious control. [Price and Shildrick 1999: 275 emphasis added]

In Sarajevo in 1993, there is an added, "surplus awareness" of beleaguered physicality of both bodies and space. At the time of production the city was under siege and subject to daily shelling and sniper fire; the lobby area of the theatre itself was a shambles, cluttered with debris from an earlier mortar attack. Both the actors and the audience were conspicuously body-fied as people who were, on average, on about two-thirds of their average weight. (That is, if I can extend myself as "average"; maybe I was luckier than most, I am not sure any more.) As Sontag puts it herself, merely venturing out to see her production, is something different.

> The difference is that actors and spectators alike can be murdered or maimed by a sniper's bullet or a mortar shell on their way to and from the theatre; but, then, that can happen to people in Sarajevo in their living rooms, while they sleep in their bedrooms, or fetch something from their kitchen, or go out their front doors. [Sontag 1994: 88-89]

> "I haven't taken a bath for sixteen months" a middle aged matron said to me. "Do you know how that feels?" And of course, I don't. I only know what is like not to take a bath for a month. [Sontag 1994: 101]

The overwhelming corrosive work of fear and insecurity in people's minds, leading to rampant depression, is also, of course, arising from physical reality, including

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[37]For the pointer to this particular reference (and indeed most of the strictly feminist substance appearing in this discussion), I am indebted to the invaluable suggestions of my wife, Tatjana Alvadj-Korenic.

bodily humiliation caused by "the indignities of daily life -- for instance, by having to spend a good part of each day seeing to it that toilets flush." (Sontag 1994: 91) Or, in my own recollection, in combination with chronic malnourishment and preciousness of water, one learns quite strange things (like some bizarre caricature of a Buddhist monk), such as how to take a shower with a single glass of water, or how to "discipline" your digestion so as to defecate only once a week or less. A totally different aspect of docility, we might say.

The infirmity of the body eventually becomes a fact in the creative process; the physical exhaustion of malnourished actors, loosing their weight and strength: "Whenever I halted the run-through for a few minutes to change a movements or a line reading, all the actors, with the exception of Ines, would instantly lie down on the stage." (Sontag 1994: 95); lack of concentration, difficulties to memorize their lines, distractions (explosions) -- actors leaving their families at home not knowing what would happen with them while they are rehearsing. In addition, there is an almost daily experience of violent death or maiming of someone you know, which the crew has also experienced. In the end:

> *Waiting for Godot* opened, with twelve candles on the stage, on August 17th. There were two performances that day, one at 2:00 PM and the other at 4:00 PM. In Sarajevo there are only matinees: hardly anybody goes out after dark. Many people were turned away. [...] And I think that was at the end of that [last] performance, during the long tragic silence [...] which follows the messenger's announcement that Mr. Godot isn't coming today, but will surely come tomorrow, that my eyes began to sting with tears. Velibor [an actor's first name] was crying too. No one in the audience made a sound. The only sounds were those coming from outside the theatre: a UN APC [armoured personnel carrier, a kind of military vehicle] thundering down the street and the crack of sniper fire. [Sontag 1994: 105, bracketed explanations added.]

2. The Reality Flirting with Hyperreality: The Performing Body in the Performing Space

> And then the things started to stabilize, which means people started to die every day, people started to be hurt every day, and we started to deal with it.
> Emina Muftić, an actress [quoted in Munk 1993a: 9]

According to theories of social constructionism, the reality is not something that is pre-given for everyone; it needs to be "constructed." The theory is ostensibly unsound when confronted with the common sense[38], but it comes to the point when supported by strenuous and unusual experiences: wars, prisons, refugee and concentration camps, major natural disasters and so on. The reality means normal, everyday reality, or "life-world" and in such situations people will *construct normalcy* out of what is apparently abnormal and accept it as normal[39]. Munk (1993a) noticed this while talking to various people in Sarajevo. For example, people would tell her that they like the theatre, because it is one of the few places where they can be together and have, at least for an hour, the illusion of normality. "Sarajevans, like everyone else in the countries of former Yugoslavia, imply by the word normal something different than our usage -- not just the average, sane or typical but a kind of everyday decency," Munk notes. Another interlocutor talked of Western democratic nations as "normal states."

Actually, normality is always negotiated from within. One may imagine it to be elsewhere, away from his or her life-world -- like this last interviewee of Munk's -- but in the end he will willy-nilly have to construct his own normality in his own environment. As a result, what one person would describe as totally crazy, will be normal to another one, who has been forced to struggle for survival in such a situation. But in the back of his or her mind, the seams of the "construct" will remain visible, and he or she will intimately know what is indeed "crazy" and what is "normal". Here we are drawn back to Goffman's complicated games of passing and performing, only on a much larger scale and with much

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[38]The physicist Alan Sokal who in the mid 1990s reached notoriety through the so-called "Sokal hoax" -- by publishing an article full of nonsensical but seriously sounding post-structuralist gibberish in a prestigious journal and then publicly disclosing the joke -- later continued ridiculing the academic establishment by inviting the proponents of the "social construction of reality" thesis to jump out the window of his 12-floor university office after constructing a reality in which they would not get killed (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 182).

[39]This is also commonly accepted answer to the question how did communist regimes in Eastern Europe managed to last so long.

wider amplitudes bordering depression and euphoria. In one typical response the subject will take the undeniable craziness of the objective reality and turn it into something "better than normal"; or if not really better, then mystifyingly special, which can be so even if obviously worse. For example, when a musician in Sontag's crew tells Munk: "From these bodies, we can make that energy. I think nowhere outside Sarajevo [...] can you get this kind of energy" (1993b: 12). I have relatively recently become aware that in English one can use the word "histrionic" -- its original Latin etymology related to acting and theatre -- to denote emotional and irritated tone used sometimes in arguing or even written polemical exchange; especially when one reacts to an emotionally perceived offense by the other. Thus, it follows, when quarrelling in a heated debate, we are slipping into our "performing," theatrical selves. This better-than-normal attitude is what I would like to associate with the notion of *performing*.

The move to construct "normal" out of "abnormal" environmental material is pervasive; it is not necessary to go to disaster-stricken areas or war-torn countries in search for it. A lot of fine qualitative sociology, particularly of the American "street corner" tradition, is generated precisely around that question. In Mitchell Duneier's recent masterpiece *Sidewalk* (2002), to take just one such example, we follow the struggle of homeless magazine vendors in New York to construct the "normal" -- and in precisely the same sense as Munk put it "not just in the sense of average, sane or typical but a kind of everyday decency."

Only there is obviously little of what one could call "performing." As another example to compensate for this I refer to Carol Rambo Ronai's noted research piece based on her experience as an exotic dancer (1992). Rambo Ronai put herself through university by stripping in the local night club; as she went on for her Master's degree, she decided to continue stripping, but also to turn the job into her research topic, carefully recording her thoughts and verbal exchanges with the men who were coming to the club to watch her. Not surprisingly the reader of Rambo Ronai's paper is confronted with a kind of highly "histrionic" account. Her narrative emphasizes a discomforting, almost violent conflict between the

actual, current self -- temporarily but in some coerced way, altered into a performing body in a performing space -- and its torturous yearning to return into its "normal" sheath.

In contrast, people from the Sarajevo story *are* normal in their own way. After all they are professional actors, which, in Weberian sense, is a calling rather than occupation, a systematic pattern of discipline and behaviour that is designed to produce a distinct sense of "personality" or self (Turner and Wainwright 2003). As such, to paraphrase Foucault, it is about serving the public with truth by means of the body. For them, therefore, the work on the stage is something not only normal, but real and important:

> Now, both our actors and our audience live every day in that situation of life and death. I am not sure it is possible for anyone else to communicate as we do with our audience [...] I am saying that the dead are nothing and everybody will die, and people laugh. That is very specific for Sarajevo. [Actor Izudin Bajrović, in interview with Munk 1993a: 12]

The macabre humour seems to be the central ingredients of the performing body. This is something we call *cynicism* -- another word which seemingly came to have a somewhat simpler meaning in English than in "continental" languages. Here it should be taken as a resignation, coming after deflation of moral outrage and sense of unserved justice. Cynicism, in this loosely termed "non-English" sense, is actually a combined *over-increased*, over-saturated awareness and *total* powerlessness in terms of practical action. This is a sort of feeling one gets out of being overwhelmed with the perceived blind idiocy of the outside world, while at the same time keeping a certain *épater-le-bourgeois*, "sophisticated," "aristocratic" capability to respond to it. (Naturally, at the end, when it is all over, all these things turn out to be more or less fake, which is why I surround them with ironic quotation marks).

It is significant, by way of comparison, that similar feeling Rambo Ronai (1992) has for her own "audience" in the night club, the similar emotional malady

of the soul, *will not* result in the presence of macabre humour. There is, most certainly, cynicism galore. For instance, in the razzing treatment she gives to a client who (seemingly unable to escape his nature even in a place devoted to "simple pleasures" for men) assumes paternalizing, "chivalrous" attitude toward her and offers her a "decent job." But, instead of macabre humour, what comes out is still only snapping, violent verbosity, directed more inward (in interior monologue part of the text) than outward. Even in teasing this man, in exercising unexpected power over him, there seem to be no traces of pleasure. But then there are important differences to take a note of: Rambo Ronai knows that, as the certain hour comes, she will go off stage, back to normality that is *ready*; already constructed for her. At the closure of her narrative we thus meet the husband, ready to give her the emotional support, but -- which matters infinitely more -- there is a *shower*, from which hot water *actually runs*, abundantly and forever. (She liked to facilitate her return to the "normal" by taking a long hot shower after coming home from the club.)

I had come to these conclusions before. At the time when *Waiting for Godot* opened in Sarajevo I had already been in Zagreb, Croatia. From that situation, I had dispatched a piece of text to a Vienna-based friend of mine (who had offered me a casual writing engagement in the paper where she was the foreign politics editor). In the following paragraph I commented on the strange absence of hatred in Sarajevo, which invariably fascinated all reporters and other observers -- in contrast to a very common prejudice they had all come with in the first place, the persistent myth of "blind age-old hatred" as something intrinsic to "Balkan character." I decided that the reason for this absence was to be found in the sense of infirmity and hopelessness:

> It is true that hatred basically emerges from feebleness, the feeling that there is nothing one can *practically* do, but when feebleness becomes profound enough, even hatred then drowns in it -- along with all kinds of emotions, if one considers hatred to be the most durable and most primitive of all emotions. Sick person never hates his or her sickness; rather, he or she will, sometimes, try to

> "aestheticize" it in some way. In order to start hating, you must at least have *some* hope and power, even crumbles of it. This way, in complete absence of these, one can only face the well-known mechanism: a deserted soul, covering itself with aestheticizing blanket, trying to protect itself from the cold of nothingness.[40]

It is almost "scary," not just embarrassing, for me to read these lines today; but not because I think they are somehow fake and pathetic. While at the first glance they definitely look so, when I give them a second thought, or, rather, a second look into the inventory of my memories -- the portrayal of the reality seems to be generally correct. What I find repudiating is the text's irreconcilable opposition to my present, "real," reality of my current life, in contrast to *that,* past reality -- which I have successfully suppressed and chased out from the everyday operations of my mind. In other words, the point is that I have ceased to inhabit my own "performing body in performing space," recoiling back into normality, while the text represents the record of the previous state. The "performing" thus does not necessarily have to be associated with actually being on stage. It is about this apparent histrionics one sees in the text that struggles to accurately reflect a certain, highly abnormal reality, as it is. Turning back to this piece, here is a description of the reality:

> Another severe winter is coming, says everybody these days... The last spring already came across with just empty meadows and bunches of trash on the sites of former city parks and shady alleys. In these conditions there will hardly be any fuel, even for the toughest ones. Food and supplies are also running out, for event the clean-off-the-map mountain roads are now scenes of escalated warfare. Gas, electricity and running water are more and more becoming just abstract notions.

And this is followed by a comment like this:

> The global situation in this town, not only recently, has bewitchingly come to look like a kind of satanic social experiment. One might say the things Josef Mengele had done on the level of individual physiology, [Bosnian Serb leader]

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[40]I am unable to reference this piece properly, as I don't recall if it was published or not. This is translated from the manuscript which I still have in my papers.

> Karadžić and his general Mladić have repeated on the level of group and social psychology[41]. But, by now, it is much harder to find anyone "in charge": the experiment continues within its own unpredictable logic.

It is perfectly understandable that people from "normal" reality, (in as Erika Munk's interlocutor would put it, "normal states") find this histrionic/performing description difficult to accept, except out of compassion, or even sheer politeness, induced with the rules of political correctness. But such acceptance, is again coerced acceptance, without real comprehension. This is because there is always something intrinsically "fake" in performing[42], or in writing or speaking, that looks like declaiming lines of a play, rather than expressing ideas or opinions. At that point we are urged to reach for the metaphor.

3. The Sorrows of Hyperreality or Metaphorical Body in Metaphorical Space

Let us now turn to that undefined "what it stands for" in Sontag's imagination: "I had spent two weeks there in April, and had come to care intensely about the battered city and what it stands for." The answer seems quite obvious: to paraphrase her own title, it is "Sarajevo as metaphor." Today, with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to argue that the origin of this metaphor is quasi-religious, or more precisely, one belonging to infernal imagery, meant to induce the feeling of *remorse*. What was common to Sontag (an Europhile American) and numerous intellectuals from Western Europe, was seeing this city as a sort of apocalyptic broken mirror of the myth of New Europe, a symbol of what they had perceived as its grand failure. By way of a strange coincidence, the Bosnian war broke out in 1992 -- the very "annus mirabilis" of the European myth, that is, the count-

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[41]This was additionally inspired by the fact that Karadžić is a psychiatrist by profession. Both men, being sought by the international tribunal for war crimes in The Hague since 1995, still remain at large.

[42]Later, in North America, I realized that "performing bodies", or what appears to be like that, do not even need a crisis to come to the surface. Consider the example of the so-called "reality TV" shows, which invariably tell us that there is no limit to stupidity, embarrassment, or humiliation, that average people will joyfully take on themselves, in order to be admitted into the hyperreal world of television.

down mythical year when the Maastricht Treaty was supposed to take effect, bringing down the border controls between (at that moment) twelve members of the European Community. Supposed to arrive as a climax, after the end of Cold War, demise of communism and the Berlin Wall -- this year had an even more special mythical meaning in the bedazzled eyes of the Europeans' poor cousins in the East -- with the ex-Yugoslavs being closer to the fire than the others.

The breakup of Yugoslavia and ensuing war befitted into this mythico-metaphorical system as an anticlimactic nemesis -- most amazingly, on the political level, the Big Powers, hitherto diligently chanting the same "unification" mantra, swiftly reversed to pre-World War I political games between "pro-Serbian" Britain and France, and "anti-Serbian" U.S. and Germany. The "age-old" nationalistic "truths" underneath the prayers of pan-Europeanism were suddenly discovered. The long forgotten but persistent rivalries among the powers instantly came back to stage -- in the early 1990s -- as soon as bipolar order, controlled by Russians and Americans, not the Europeans, started to crumble. In response, at the cultural and intellectual plane, the philosopher kings of Parisian Left Bank took Bosnia, and the West's failure to save it, as a metaphor of swan song of Idea of Europe as such, and constructionist modernity in general.

The failure of power brokers of the "normal states" to act in physical reality (by simply halting the carnage through massive military involvement) -- while the *infernal imagery* of ceaseless killing continued to splash the media screens -- simply "pushed" the whole scene into the realm of metaphor. This consequence was not at all surprising: we just need to turn back to what I have delineated as specific meaning of *cynicism:* an amalgamation of awareness, of knowing in great detail, and utter powerlessness[43] to actually, as Sontag would put it, "pitch in and do something." The result is essentially the same: instead of

[43]It may sound paradoxical to ascribe "powerlessness" to the West; but only if one confuses the notions of "power" and "force". Of course, already on classic Weberian terms, power is a compound, of which force is only one, though essential, *part.* Here, the term is meant to denote a lack of political resolve to stand up for the values one allegedly believes in, not, of course, having no means to enforce it.

"reality TV" in the "performing space" there occurred "TV reality" in the metaphorical space -- eventually offering a spectacular practical corroboration of Jean Baudrillard's famous notion of "hyperreality."

Baudrillard himself harshly criticized Sontag: the people of Sarajevo have "most certainly seen their share of good friends. Most recently, it was Susan Sontag who came to stage *Waiting for Godot.* Why not bring *Bouvard et Pécuchet* to Somalia or Afghanistan?" (1996: 80) In Baudrillard's view, the way we see it is all wrong. The Bosnians do not actually provoke "pity" in the West but "envy": "They are strong and we are weak," Baudrillard says:

> But of course Susan Sontag is from New York, and she must have a better idea than they of what reality is, since she chose them to incarnate this reality. Perhaps it is simply because this reality is what she and the Western world most lack. To re-create reality, one must go where the blood flows, and all these "corridors" we have opened for our food and "cultural" shipments are really emergency lifelines along which we import their life blood, and the energy of their misery... yet another unequal exchange. [Baudrillard 1996: 81]

Many other theorists, however, found Baudrillard's conduct morally disturbing: his "flood of verbosity on the atrocities in Bosnia (as is well known he has argued that the Gulf War and similar events constitute simulacra, media events)" was often seen as distressing or "painful" (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 183). Yet Bosnians themselves (or at least these people I know so well) would probably have more understanding for his point -- seeing this moralizing rebuttal as accusing the mirror for your ugliness. Alvesson and Sköldberg put this detail in the context of their own comment on the "Sokal hoax", but, as I have already said, such viewpoint fails to understand that metaphor can *indeed* eat someone's social reality away, suck it out, and install itself in his or her world as "hyperreality".

Perhaps, like in this question, posed by the actress Muftić: "Madam Erika, do you have the impression that we are in a special resort, or a zoo, or something like that?" (Munk 1993b: 13). The sheer pain of this insight, the sarcasm driven to the threshold of pain, goes miles beyond simply defining the tenor and the

vehicle of this particular metaphor, or pointing out at our -- perfectly legitimate -- need to metaphorize Evil, since it is the only way that we can conceptualize it.

I should like to conclude this chapter with two remarkable, yet starkly different examples metaphoric entrepreneurship.

Performance in the Service of the Metaphor. In the dark, cold winter of 1994 the conductor Zubin Mehta arrived in Sarajevo, with the singers José Carreras (tenor), Ruggero Raimondi (bass), Cecilia Gasdia (soprano) and Ildiko Koldosi (mezzo soprano). Accompanied by the choir of the Sarajevo Cathedral and the local philharmonic, they performed Mozart's *Requiem* in what was left of the atrium of the Bosnian National and University Library, shelled and burned a year and a half before.

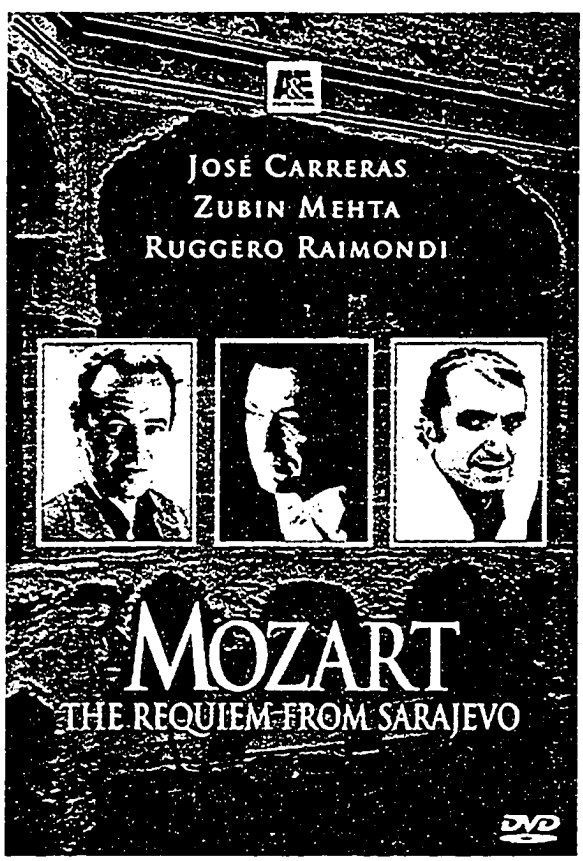

Figure 5: Requiem from Sarajevo, an A & E DVD issue

Due to security concerns, no physical audience was admitted -- the musicians were made fully aware that their lives were at risk -- but the concert was filmed and televized directly to 26 countries around the world. Recently the film has been released on DVD and on the internet discussion group a blogger complained about horrible sound quality and pathetic performance given by frozen and hungry musicians. The avalanche of angry retorts ensued: "It's not about music, dummy!"

What is it about, then? Let's quote some of the bloggers[44]:

* The text of Mozart's Requiem is so appropriate, in its solemnity and also in its ultimate hope of redemption. God bless the courageous participants in this concert.

  "Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
  et lux perpetua luceat eis,
  cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,
  quia plus es".

  "Grant the dead eternal rest, O Lord,
  and may perpetual light shine on them,
  with Thy saints for ever,
  because Thou art merciful".

* I found this to be one of the most dramatic examples of courage and the human spirit -- related to the arts -- that I have ever seen!

* People were being shot while trying to get water back to their apartments and cellars - where they were trying to survive the siege. Imaging polishing up YOUR violin skills in a cold, dark room - alone. Imagine walking down the street carrying your instrument knowing that you might be shot dead at any moment. Might make concentrating on Mozart a bit more difficult.

* Why would a conductor, a camera team or sound engineer want to even do something like this? To get the best music or video? Their reason: Not to give in to the forces of evil and brutality and ugliness. To look death and evil in the face and make music! Astounding.

In reality the rural Serb gunmen who destroyed this building maybe didn't even know there were some books inside. Because of its convenient location only a few hundred metres from the frontline, they thought, I suspect, it might by used by their enemies for military purposes. However, the *metaphorical* damage they

[44]From: http://www.movie-pages.com/movie/mozart:-requiem-from-Sarajevo/6305075867

inflicted on themselves -- as Herostratic book-torching barbarians -- was irreparable. Following the proposition made by Tzvetan Todorov in his book about Spanish conquest of America (1983), that Spaniards defeated the Aztecs by the force of *signs*, one might say that the Serbs started the war propelled by the force of a metaphor (the misty, mythical memory of a certain fourteenth century battle) only to be thwarted by a set of other, more powerful, universal metaphors, that the West chose to find in the hapless Bosnian capital city.

"Hijacked" or "traversed" metaphor. In the early 1980s the Italian garment tycoon Luciano Benetton hired the fashion photographer Oliviero Toscani as his advertising director, thus launching one of the most remarkable postmodern symbioses between artistic avant-garde and the "new capitalism" in the recent memory. Going one step beyond the standard "substanceless brand" advertising -- then typical of American corporations like Coca-Cola, Disney etc. -- Toscani totally revolutionized the very notion of the trade, as his posters and billboards simply *refused to have anything to do with the products they were supposed to promote.* Instead, his photographs were standalone works, always politically charged, showing only an unobtrusively placed green tag with the company's trademark slogan "UNITED COLORS OF BENETTON". Benetton gave Toscani free hands and the sales soon soared through the roof: the politically correct (but very brand-sensitive) high-tech yuppies of the 1990s accepted the game, and turned the brand into one of their preferred statutory "signs of sophistication."

In the beginning Toscani carried out this socio-political messaging with a note of humour, typically translating the "united colors" slogan into ironic twist of our notions of human races (various pictures of black, white and Asian babies and nurslings etc). Then he went on to introduce more radical solutions, usually sexual in nature, bit by bit. In 1992, however, he decided on a shocking turn and presented a group composition with a terminal AIDS patient, his disfigured body on full display, surrounded by his grieving family. The next year he acquired permission to photograph American death row inmates. Each portrait came with

the prisoner's full name, date of birth, the crime he was sentenced for, and expected execution date.

In 1994 Toscani turned to the Bosnian war, correctly detecting a gold mine of metaphors and representations to comment on. The result was a still life showing carefully arranged, blood-soaked, camouflage pants and white T-shirt. The uniform belonged to a slain Bosnian Croat militiaman by the name of

Figure 6: Oliviero Toscani. *The "Marinko Gagro" poster* (1994)

Marinko Gagro. As with the AIDS patient and death row inmates, Gagro's name, dates of birth and death, were published on the poster, only now couched as a short message in the Serbo-Croatian language ("My name is... etc.").

This time, however, the public was outraged. The Vatican's semi-official newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* described Toscani as a "pictorial terrorist" (the church had already been attacked by an earlier poster showing a man dressed as priest kissing a woman dressed as nun, but there was no reaction). The Society for Threatened Peoples, a Germany-based human rights group, accused him of "complicity in genocide". Although most postmodern art critics and intellectuals from various corners of the world (including those in all parts of the former Yugoslavia) rose up to his defence, the Benetton's consumers, apparently, reacted

adversely as well. Toscani survived, however, and stayed with the company until 2000, but his appetite for shocking had to be toned down considerably[45].

* * *

Today we may describe Toscani's work as a sort of visual pendant to Žižek's writing on "fantasy" or Baudrillard's on "hyperreality". When I say pendant, I mean that we cannot use these writings to comment *on* Toscani's posters, as they already are comments themselves, expressing similar ideas in a different medium. In other words, the pictures should be seen as existing in parallel to these texts -- rather than using the texts to *interpret* the pictures, or pictures to *illustrate* the texts. The "hijacked" metaphor refers to a metaphor that is attacked already in execution so it gets stripped of its tenor and left to operate by itself in the free-float of hyperreality; the "traversed" aims at the notion of "traversing the fantasy" in which we glimpse that what we had taken for reality (a fashionable commodity with a certain claim to beauty and elegance) was all along an illusion masking the space of the "Real" reality of disease and murder.

The adverse public reaction, however, is more interesting sociologically. It shows that the metaphor can be as strong as a brick wall and actually *resist* the hijacking/traversing, and this is precisely how "scandal" is produced in the post-bourgeois, yuppie-capitalism, centred around bureaucratic enforcement of the political correctness. When he thematized AIDS, Toscani was still going along with the permitted: no matter how shocking, he was still doing something that goes under the rubric of "raising awareness." With the death-row inmates he just tackled the issue that many Americans (certainly most *Benetton* consumers) and virtually all Europeans see as a barbaric anachronism that has nothing to do with themselves. They were still clearly all on the same side. But with the soldier, we are stepping to the unknown, unmapped territory, without the phantasmic

[45]From: http: www.grg23-alterlaa.ac.at/menschenrechte/Toscani/toscani.html

framework "which tells us how we are to understand the letter of the Law" (Žižek 1997: 29), where "the act" essentially erupts into non-compliance and loosens the very basic ideological grip on our sense of reality. Simply put, here we have no straightforward guidelines -- available through courses on cross-cultural sensitivity -- to tell us if this is okay or not. One must think for himself and that's not good enough.

Conclusion: Recasting "Representation"

Much of the chapter on "positioning" I spent trying to elucidate the problem of representation by way of a personal life situation; narrating an incident plucked from memory, I used a specific narrative technique of switching positions between "subject" and "object". The technique is essentially piggybacking on what certain modern novelists do, handling a character by continuously swapping between "going in" and telling the character's own story, and then quickly "coming out" to describe -- as coolly as possible -- what he or she "objectively" is. In the first case, I offer myself as subject, seen at work of representing his momentary other -- although in a deliberately caricatured way, for the sake of making the point. In the second, *the subject is* (not necessarily identical to *"I am")* imagining himself as object: guessing/obsessing how he might be represented by others -- arguably, in equally caricatured way. Goffman's dramaturgical model -- which, with regards to typical intellectual *repères* of his own time, one might describe as sociological/pragmatic redress of the existentialist and phenomenological inflation of the subject -- lends itself naturally to this intricacy. Turning back once again to Scheff's explication, through its "two interior components" (embarrassment and intersubjectivity), the whole model may be condensed to a single statement: *The*

self's constant fear of, and effort to avoid embarrassment, implies continuous thinking about others' thoughts about self.[46]

The second chapter turns to *imagining*. In it I juxtaposed a discussion of a specific Balkan variant of Orientalist "imagining" throughout the 1990s with a story of several randomly chosen images. Why would I do something like this? Basically, in a move parallel to "return to Goffman" in the preceding chapter, I made another step back toward some classic, but today almost forgotten notions of "representation". In our contemporary understanding of the concept we tend to forget, for instance, that *chronological primacy* in questioning of representation goes to Cubist painters, rather than to sociologists, anthropologists and post-colonial theorists of our own time. The same even applies -- according to some commentators -- to reflexivity itself: the avant-garde's "special achievement" was in its deconstruction of mediated representation with "the classical mind's becoming aware of its means for thinking and representing the world even as it carries out that representation. This is an event that may be called reflexive" (Fry 1988: 296). The Cubists' (and before them Impressionists') handling of space and time is in these theories "directly but reflexively related to the classical tradition" (Fry 1988: 299) where all aspects of a subject are presented in such a way as to concentrate and unify the underlying idea, rather than mediated by the conventions of the one-point perspective, in which space is understood to be measurable and continuous. The sociological significance of both construction and destruction of the one-point perspective has usually been interpreted historically as a trajectory from foundation of the self-confident, expansionist Western subject (in the

[46]In one makeshift training manual issued by a local mental health/elderly care facility, I once came across a definition of confusion which runs like this: "Confusion is a temporary mental disturbance characterized by a behaviour that is seen by other people as different from the expected, in that place and at that time" (quoted from a laser-printed handout, without expressed authorship or date). We have surely come a long way from Sartre's vision of hell as "other people" but one also wonders about a few other questions, for example what is the link between a society "characterized by" such a low degree of tolerance for different behaviours and, on the other side, almost religious adulation of a thinker like Derrida among its intellectual youth.

Renaissance) and its mortal crisis in the last turn of the centuries. I essentially followed one tardy play-back of these themes in the Bosnian situation.

In the third chapter I focus on an event -- quite remarkable if admittedly a bit bizarre -- that illustrated an attempt to do away with "representation" outright, by replacing it with a "real life" experience -- but, paradoxically, through literal presenting on stage. By way of "imitating", rather than strictly practicing -- as I have said in the introduction -- the conventional qualitative methods, I opened the topics of metaphor, and intellectual/moral *engagement*, "commitment to the metaphor". Due to specificity of a drastically aggravated physical situation the bodily themes lent themselves naturally, as well as those related to performativity, as sketched in the first chapter.

In concluding synthesis I start from a different point of view and first take a look into the concept of representation itself, aiming to sketch it out and then broach some sort of genealogy of both its formation in our common culture and of our current preoccupation with it. "Representation" is certainly one of those complex, ambiguous words, pregnant with a host of meanings, that give so much headache to the learners of English. A relatively simplified dictionary, such as *Gage Canadian*, lists nine denotations: "1. the act of representing; 2. the condition or fact of being represented: Taxation without representation is tyranny; 3. representatives considered as a group; 4. a likeness, picture, model; 5. symbol, sign; 6. a performance of a play, presentation; 7. the process of forming mental images or ideas; 8. a protest, complaint; 9. an account, statement: false representations."[47]

Of course, what is meant by it here is not the entire list of meanings, only the item #7 and, perhaps, in ancillary sense, #4 and #5. But what do we precisely mean by "representation" in social sciences and broader social criticism? The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* starts out from a properly Foucauldian formula-

[47]Yet we should be cautious about assigning it completely to the proverbial "English ambiguity", of which the French complain so often: in their own language, in addition to, I suspect, most of these meanings, the word also denotes the profession of travelling salesmen.

tion: "Representation refers to the way in which images and texts reconstruct, rather than reflect, the original sources they represent" (Marshall 1998). In other words (as outlined in the previous chapter by way of Stuart Hall), the first thing we need to put forth is that a painting, photograph, or text about a sheep is never "really" sheep. Rather, it is the reconstruction of what "seemed to be" a sheep to the one who rendered (that is, represented) it (ibid). If it *were* a sheep indeed, then it could not be a photograph, painting, or text.

The reasons why I call this definition "Foucauldian" are more clearly visible in its (the *Oxford's)* subsequent run. Here, it is just alluded to through accentuation of the difference between "reflection" and "reconstruction", where we can detect the affinity with Foucault's exegesis of European scientific knowledge as a historical sequence, from resemblance (in Renaissance), to representation (in the "classical age" or Enlightenment). As per Hall's interpretation, he summarizes the notion of representation as "a source for the production of social knowledge (...) connected in more intimate ways with social practices and questions of power" (1997: 42), a station it assumed after Foucault moved away from structuralism and settled the relation between discourse, knowledge and power. He (Foucault) thus "rescued representation from the clutches of a purely formal theory and gave it a historical, practical and 'worldly' context of operation" (Hall 1997: 47). Indisputably, this is the exact point of departure of the *concept* of representation -- or, rather, of its career -- as we know it today, as a requisite analytic tool, notably in feminist and post-colonial applications of post-structuralist/postmodern theoretical strategies.

Why, then, should we want to take a step back from here? To put it in simplest possible way (if admittedly a little arrogant): with witness' accounts such as those from Justice Cassese's court papers, as well as with my own memories, I just don't need Foucault to tell me that

> ... one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the

> form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning ... [quoted in Hall 1997: 43]

The next question is how does one do this. A fairly obvious method may be in reverting Hall's explanation: one now aims at rescuing the notion from the clutches of the 'worldly' (by which I mean simplicistically politicized) and returning it to more formal domains of linguistics, psychology, history of ideas, and even etymology. In this sense, we are taking a step back in order to return, but acknowledging where we came from.

The question of how words represent things dates at least back to Plato's postulate of *mimesis,* "a natural correspondence between words and things" (Calhoun 2002). A myriad of sources springing form there -- sources of what we today call "representation" -- may include medieval realist-nominalist controversy, Kant's distinction of "phenomena" and "noumena", entire western aesthetics, art history and so forth. The story typically ends with structural linguistics of de Saussure and Jakobson, breaking off, as it were, the thing-word pair and stating that words really have nothing to with things, but with each other. For my own purpose, speaking offhand and without any exhaustive argumentation, I would like to bring up three incidental stops alongside this road (while there certainly are others), where "representation" explicitly appears as word, or at least it does so in English.

The first one, in chronological sense, starts out in a sort of philological point, as it were, that we may find in "representation" as the Anglo-French/Romance rendition of German *Vorstellung:* "The World as Will and *Representation"* seems like the more common of the two existing translations of the famous Schopenhauer's title, the other one being "The World as Will and Idea" and the same ambiguity is then transferred into the jargon of psychoanalysis. In support of the latter translation, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973: 200) also contend that *Vorstellung* is "part of the traditional vocabulary in German philosophy" whose "traditional English equivalent is idea" (1973: 203) -- the latter being "that which

one represents to oneself, that which forms the concrete content of an act of thought, and in particular the reproduction of an earlier perception" (1973: 200).

The full heading of the entry in their multilingual glossary, however, is *"Idea (or Presentation or Representation)"*, while Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese equivalents of this are the variants of "representation" alone (1973: 200). Therefore, the term "representation" -- in this particular aspect of its career in English -- is not "lost in translation" but, rather, procured in it[48].

The next "stop" I would like to suggest is Piaget's classic child psychology. In particular, I bear in mind his notion of "object permanence", the infant's gradual mastery of the fact that an object still exists "in the world" even when it goes off his/her visual scope (a toy that has fallen under the bed); a cognitive accomplishment only possible, after the infant has developed the skill of memory and became able to form *representations* of objects in his/her mind. From this point it can

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[48]For Freud the idea (Vorstellung) is contrasted to affect (Affekt) as two opposite ways through which the instinct expresses itself. Having such a possibility available to him in German -- a language morphologically less dependent on the common Greco-Latin fountain in formation of abstract concepts, and consequently marked by a much greater philosophical malleability -- Freud eventually puts both together into *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* or "Ideational Representative," a mediator through which the instinct leaves its mark in the psyche.

In the particular case of "representation" some interesting parallels are also revealed when compared with examples from the German-influenced Slavic languages -- one of them being my mother tongue. In Serbo-Croatian virtually none of the meanings from the *Gage Dictionary* list applies and the corresponding word *("reprezentacija")* generally has a show-off purpose. Two peculiar meanings may illustrate the point. In the first case, the noun denotes national sports teams, as something quite different from ordinary sports teams. (Those are termed with English-imported words *"klub"* or *"tim"* /team/.) In short, *"reprezentacija"* is the best of the best; a group of individuals who, by showcasing themselves, represent "all of us" -- not just fans of a particular "klub" or followers of a particular sport. Similarly, the derived adjective, *"reprezentativan"*, can be described as augmentation of English "presentable" to the first-class level: while "presentable" is generally acceptable for presentation, one becomes "reprezentativan" only at one's very best. The second meaning is associated with the Balkan business culture, that includes a custom of closing important deals, marking important events, or welcoming important clients and partners, with a shot of hard liquor (imperatively of top quality and price), stashed in a special cabinet in the executive's office. This stash and the moneys allocated for its maintenance is also called "reprezentacija". (This meaning may be compared with the English business term "entertainment expenses".)

Furthermore, the word for theatrical performance *("predstava")* is a contraction semantically/morphologically identical to "Vorstellung" (literally, "that-which-is-put-in-front"). In the Serbian variant, this is also the word for "representation" as mental image/idea, while Croatian *("predodžba")* is even more precise: "that-which-is-put-in-front-of-eyes". The derived verb *"predstavljati"*, however, denotes political and legal representation (in Serbian variant).

proceed to acquire knowledge, which, however, is neither "ready made" nor simply "learned". Rather, it is "constructed by the human subject" (Morris 1991: 411), in the process of "equilibration," the organism's active and self-regulated adaptation to the environment. Concurrently with Goldmann's advancement of similar ideas in sociology ("genetic structuralism") and then Giddens's subsequent "structuration" -- these undertakings can be described as attempts to find some sort of middle ground and salvage the subject from "death sentence" imposed on it by structuralists and, even more so, poststructuralists.

Lastly, at the third "stop" we of course return to our initial point of departure, Foucault's "archaeology" as given above. While his insistence on historical-sequential dimension in formation of discourse and knowledge ultimately leads him to wholesale rejection of structuralism, the subject is now entirely disposed of: it is *discourse*, not the subjects, who "speak" the "meaning", which in turn produces knowledge. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they are operating within the limits of episteme, the discursive formation, the regime of truth, of a particular period and culture (Hall 1997: 55). Basically speaking, we are following a trajectory in which the subject descends from its privileged absoluteness (first stop), to a more politicized precariousness in which it (the subject) must negotiate its "equilibrium" within the structured environment (second stop), to a sense of almost comical superfluousness in which the doomed subject becomes not only disposable and unnecessary, but also -- occasionally -- downright wicked. Along the same path, however -- and pretty much on the same "stops" -- , we are also following the deterioration of the Western knowledge from philosophy, to theory, to, say, advocacy. As I have attempted to show, the problem is in the assumption that a performative *pose* of the "offended" can come in lieu of the *really political* revolt of the "subjugated". This, in my view, is the Achilles' heel of "identity politics" *en gross*. As a corollary, the critique of representation -- perceived as something ineluctably injurious to someone's sense of self-identity -- cannot be used for his or her political reestablishment, as I have hinted in my Introduction. For such a goal, he or she must embark on a struggle

to restore his or her subjectivity, *not* to go along with poststructuralists who demand the contrary. In other words, one can only enter the democratic political field after becoming "nothing" in terms of identity (see Žižek 1998) since only "nothing" can be that civis politicus who is the atom of democracy. For example, the famous "We, the people..." from the American Declaration of Independence essentially means "we, the nothing" -- we, who are just people, nothing in particular. Grammatically this "nothing" is situated precisely into the definite article "the": without this "the", people are just Tom, Dick and Harry, or "a people", a certain "identified" group, say, Palestinians. One beautiful example of this paradox -- that Žižek (1998) reminds us of -- comes from the days of German reunification when the famous slogan "Wir sind *das* Volk!" (We are *the* people) all of a sudden, in a matter of days, even hours, changed into "Wir sind *ein* Volk!" (We are a/one people). In this very moment, through this tiny linguistic slippage, the "revolution" -- creation of a brand new body politic through the act of "the people" -- was lost. The whole thing was forfeited and became what it was doomed to be "in reality": not unification, but colonization of East Germany by West Germany.

Insofar as this preceding argument is, we may say, a *political* plea for a divorce of "identity" from "politics", or necessity of such a move, the main body of my thesis should be seen as the view of the same problem, from the other, "identitary", side. I have given "cultural" and "intellectual" arguments for such a divorce earlier in this concluding commentary -- as well as in introduction, by using those (such arguments) given by others (Rojek and Turner 2000). The fact of the matter is that this, for me personally, is already a "done deal", which is why I have been able to remain utterly "unoffended" by the conduct of the school-teacher, the judge, the writer, the fashion photographer and other heroes of my narrative. I am of course well aware of a certain *deviance* of such an outcome, when compared with usual writings about representations, which some may find

confusing -- myself included. But, the question of how to sort out that confusion, after all, is what prompted me to write this in the first place.

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